

FADE IN:

EXT. SHORES OF THE DELAWARE/HIGH STREET - DAWN

A resplendent sun rises amid dark, portentous skies.

SUPERIMPOSE: PHILADELPHIA, AUGUST 28, 1769

The Pennsylvania Packet sits among ships at port. Dashing first-mate, LAMBERT WICKES, 22, feeds crumbs to a flock of noisy seagulls.

A lone kingbird, perched atop a sail, ignores the feeding frenzy below and flies to town. Descending upon a bread shop, the bird retrieves a loose pastry as it falls from a patron's bag.

Next door, a newsboy gathers papers in the window-front office of the Pennsylvania Gazette. While making his early deliveries, he approaches an archway leading to Franklin Court.

Just as the kingbird soars overhead, a woman's muffled scream draws the boy's attention to the illuminated second floor window of the Franklin household.

INT. FRANKLIN COURT HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The usually cheery, chatty, and chubby SARAH FRANKLIN BACHE, 25, lies in labor. She is tended to by her tall, potbellied husband, RICHARD BACHE, 31; dark-eyed, matronly mother, DEBORAH FRANKLIN, 62; and African maid, MILLIE, 36.

As Deborah wipes Sarah's forehead, Millie prepares for the delivery. Richard paces from bedpost to bedpost until hearing a NEWBORN cry.

Holding a knife, he carries a water-filled bedpan to his mother-in-law. Together, they wash the baby and cut his umbilical cord. While Deborah wraps him in a blanket, Millie removes the soiled linens. Richard comforts his wife.

RICHARD

We have a son.

SARAH

(faintly)

I wish to hold him, Richard.

RICHARD

Rest now, Sarah, my dear.

Deborah, sitting in a rocker, cradles the infant.

DEBORAH

(sings)

Kingbird, my little Kingbird/  
Flying high, flying free.

(speaks)

If only Ben were here...

Bending his knees, Richard gazes at his son.

RICHARD  
He has sent word of his return.

DEBORAH  
I have stopped believing his word.

Her lonely eyes drift upon a life-size portrait of Benjamin Franklin looming on the far wall.

EXT./INT. CHRIST CHURCH - DAY

A golden sun glistens through the tall, gallant trees—penetrating the clear glass windows. Soft hymnal music fills the air.

Sarah, Richard, WILLIAM FRANKLIN, 34, an urbane variant of his father (Benjamin), and REV. WILLIAM WHITE, 39, gather around the baptismal font. Deborah appears with the baby—placing him in Sarah's arms.

DEBORAH  
'Tis the same font used to christen William Penn over a century ago.

SARAH  
I do wish Papa were here.

WILLIAM  
Papa knows nothing of his grandson's birth—yet you insist on calling him the boy's Godfather—

DEBORAH  
Enough William. Rev. White...

The Reverend, receiving the baby, holds him over the font.

REV. WHITE  
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, I baptize thee Benjamin Franklin Bache.

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT - SPRING DAY

A front façade, comprising several row homes and a gated carriage-way, shelters the court from High Street traffic. As the sunlight shimmers, Sarah and Deborah greet the spry JANE FRANKLIN MECOM, 58. She unties her bonnet.

JESSE, 16, a slave girl, lugs Jane's bag to a centrally appointed red brick house—surrounded by green grass and glowing flowerbeds.

SARAH  
Aunt Jane, thank God you have arrived! How was your trip?

JANE  
A bit bumpy, I should say...  
Deborah, it has been far too long.

DEBORAH  
Come. Meet your grandnephew, Benny.

In the rear garden, Millie watches the boy-asleep in a cradle under the shade of a (mulberry) tree. As the Franklin women approach, she retreats. Jane reaches for Benny. His deep, dark eyes open.

JANE  
A darling baby. His face favors  
Ben-but his eyes favor you, Debbie.

Deborah beams.

JANE  
Speaking of Ben-has he written you,  
lately?

DEBORAH  
Apparently, your brother has been  
too busy to write to his wife.

SARAH  
(softly to Jane)  
Mama is a bit sensitive these days.

JANE  
(handing the baby to Deborah)  
Forgive me. Ben is usually good-

Deborah returns Benny to the cradle. The women sit nearby.

SARAH  
Have you any news, Aunt Jane?

JANE  
A story of daring-not unlike the  
time your mother safeguarded this  
house from the local rowdies who  
thought Ben favored the Stamp Act.

DEBORAH  
An exaggeration.

SARAH  
We laugh at mother's modesty. She  
defended this house and Papa's honor  
most courageously-virtually driving-  
off the intruders single handedly.

The baby cries. Jane rocks the cradle-soothing him.

JANE  
I worry for Benny's future.

SARAH  
Really Aunt Jane? Why is that?

JANE  
(gazing at the sky)  
The world, as we know it, is soon  
to change. Revolution? Perhaps.

DEBORAH  
The world is always changing.

JANE  
The "massacre" in Boston, last month,  
is surely a sign...

FLASHBACK - BOSTON CUSTOMS HOUSE - SNOWY NIGHT (MARCH 5, 1770)

From a distance, Jane sees the stout SAMUEL ADAMS, 48, conferring  
with six boys. They pelt a lone BRITISH SENTRY with snowballs.

BOYS  
Lobster back. Red back.

Firing a warning shot, the sentry takes aim at them. British  
reinforcements quickly respond. One boy breaks rank.

SENTRY  
Stop or I'll shoot.

The boy freezes. Bostonians, led by a tall, fearless mulatto,  
CRISPUS ATTUCKS, 28, intervene—clubbing soldiers. Jane encroaches.

BOSTONIANS  
Bullies. Bloody backs. Go home.

As a LIEUTENANT points his rifle at Attucks, troops target townies.

LIEUTENANT  
Mr. Attucks, do not force our fire.

ATTUCKS  
Fire and be damned.

LIEUTENANT  
Ready... Aim...

JANE  
(charging into a soldier)  
Noooo...

LIEUTENANT  
Fire.

Shots ring out. Attucks and two others fall dead. Nine lie  
wounded. Their blood flows in tiny streams upon the snow.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT./INT. PHILADELPHIA - CARPENTER'S HALL - DAY (SEPTEMBER, 1774)

A portrait of the First Continental Congress comes to life. COLONEL GEORGE WASHINGTON (in uniform), 42, DUANE JAMES, 37, JOSEPH GALLOWAY, 36, PATRICK HENRY, 38, PRESIDENT PEYTON RANDOLPH, 53, JOHN HANCOCK, 37, JOHN ADAMS, 39, RICHARD HENRY LEE, 36, JOHN JAY, 30, Sam Adams, and various women congregate.

JAMES

We loyalists are few, Mr. Galloway.

As delegates enter the hall, the thin, chinless Galloway notices Deborah, Sarah (pregnant), and Benny, now 5, approaching Washington.

GALLOWAY

Col. Washington, I present the wife of the esteemed Dr. Franklin.

(whispering)

She is recovering from a stroke.

Washington removes his hat and extends his forearm. Deborah grips it—gesturing her gratitude to the departing Galloway.

WASHINGTON

Mrs. Franklin.

DEBORAH

Allow me to introduce my d-daughter, Sarah, and my grandson, B-Benny.

(Sarah curtsies, Benny bows)

BENNY

My duty to you, Sir.

DEBORAH

Colonel, your influence with Congress is undeniable. Please steady its hand and consider the fate of our b-beloved Benjamin as he lobbies in London on b-behalf of the Colonies.

WASHINGTON

Do you fear for his safety?

Deborah prompts Sarah to hand him a stack of letters.

DEBORAH

The seals of his letters are broken b-before they arrive—if they arrive at all. He has written us, in code, of his b-being watched and followed.

SARAH

Your Excellency, since his dismissal as Postmaster General, there have been numerous threats upon his life. Mother has begged him to come home.

BENNY  
 (tugging on Washington's coat)  
 Please help my Grandpapa.

WASHINGTON  
 (returning the letters)  
 I promise you, Congress does not  
 intend to put "the Good Doctor"  
 at further risk—but we cannot  
 guarantee his safety.

The Colonel tips his hat and enters the hall. Benny, following him,  
 peeks through the door. A spirited Patrick Henry speaks.

HENRY  
 The distinctions between Virginians,  
 Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and  
 New Englanders are no more... I,  
 Patrick Henry, am not a Virginian,  
 but an American.

Wild applause erupts.

GALLOWAY  
 Mr. President, I object.

Tempers flare. The President's gavel turns thunderous.

INT./EXT. FRANKLIN COURT HOUSE - PARLOR - DAY

Boisterous thunder rocks the room as a wicked storm brews outside.  
 Deborah sits at a desk writing a letter—all the while minding  
 Benny and his sleeping brother, WILLY, 2.

A howling wind kicks open a window shutter. Lightning strikes.  
 Benny, standing in front of a larger-than-life portrait of his  
 grandfather, drops a toy soldier and runs to his grandmother.  
 Closing the shutter, she embraces him.

DEBORAH  
 'Tis scary, my Kingbird. Grandpapa's  
 lightning rod will pr-protect us.  
 (gazing at Willy)  
 Does nothing wake your br-brother?

BENNY  
 Where is Mama?

Returning to the desk, she picks up a quill. He follows.

DEBORAH  
 As I t-told you, visiting your  
 Uncle William in New Jersey.

BENNY  
 (peeping at the letter)  
 You are writing Grandpapa!

DEBORAH

(kissing Benny's forehead)  
I am writing t-to tell him what a special g-good b-boy you have been—buying your brother a present with your b-birthday money.

BENNY

Is London farther than New Jersey?

DEBORAH

Listen to your G-Grandpapa's words.  
"...The Bishop's wife, toasting Master B-Benny Bache on the occasion of his birthday said, 'may he be as good a man as his grandfather...'"

Benny sits on her lap.

DEBORAH AND FRANKLIN (OS)

"...I said, 'I hoped he would b-be much better.' Bishop Shipley added, 'We will be contented if he should not prove quite so g-good...'"

As a tear falls from her eye, he gently wipes it away.

BENNY

Grandmamma, you are sad.

Brushing him off, she continues writing. Meanwhile, he stares at his grandfather's likeness.

DEBORAH

Not since b-before you were born have I laid eyes on him... Me thinks I shall never see him again.

BENNY

Will I ever be as good as Grandpapa?

Suddenly, the front door bursts open. A soaked Sarah emerges.

DEBORAH

Sarah? You st-startled us.

BENNY

(racing to his mother)  
Mama!

She turns to embrace him but refrains—grabbing a towel instead.

SARAH

I am afraid I am sopping wet...  
Have you behaved yourself?

Benny nods. Sarah kisses her mother.

DEBORAH  
His temperament is easy to govern—  
I would b-be lonesome without him.

Sarah, watching Benny tend to his awakened brother, joins him.

SARAH  
I often have to mortify myself for  
fear of spoiling him—he does a great  
deal out of affection...

DEBORAH (OS)  
Speaking of b-brothers, how is—

SARAH  
(kissing Willy)  
See for yourself. He would not allow  
me to travel alone in the storm—but  
I really think he came to see you.

Deborah falls from her chair. Benny and Sarah rush to her side.

BENNY  
Grandmamma!

SARAH  
Mama!

William enters and removes his drenched hat.

WILLIAM  
Where are my little nephews?

SARAH  
Will, thank God! Help us carry Mama—  
(moving her to the sofa)  
I think she has had another stroke.

WILLIAM  
Papa really ought to be here—

SARAH  
This is not the time—fetch Dr. Bond.

As William grabs his hat, Benny opens the door to the flooded court.

INT. FRANKLIN COURT HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY (DECEMBER 15, 1774)

Lying listlessly in bed, Deborah stares at her husband's portrait.  
As Sarah reads one of his letters, Richard and Benny stand guard.

SARAH AND FRANKLIN (VO)  
"...Playing in London with little  
Billy Hewson makes me long to be  
at home with you and Benny..."

Benny looks to his mother. She redirects his attention.

FRANKLIN (VO)

"...It seems but the other day that you and I were ranked among the boys and girls, so swiftly does time fly. We've reason to be thankful—so much of our lives has passed so happily."

DEBORAH

B-Benjamin.

Putting the letter aside, Sarah looks out the window at the falling snow. A single tear rolls down her cheek.

SARAH

We are here—Richard, Benny, and I.

DEBORAH

My little K-Kingbird.

Sarah moves him to the fore.

DEBORAH

And my B-Ben—

RICHARD

We await his arrival any day—

A peaceful grin forms on Deborah's dying face.

SARAH

Mama? Mama!

Richard closes Deborah's eyes and removes his wife to an armchair. Benny places his head in his mother's lap and weeps.

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT HOUSE - DAY

(MAY, 1775)

Sarah sweeps the front stoop. An animated, lean, and long-nosed Englishman, TOM PAINE, 38, advances.

PAINE

Sarah Bache! A beautiful spring day.

SARAH

Indeed it is, Tom Paine.

PAINE

What are you doing?

SARAH

Just tidying.

PAINE

Have you not heard the town crier? Dr. Franklin's ship has landed.

She drops her broom and tidies herself.

SARAH

Richard! Benny! Come quickly! Oh Tom, my father has not laid eyes on me in ten years. I am afraid I am not the little Sally he remembers.

PAINÉ

Come now—you are a fine woman.

Richard, smoking a pipe, appears at the door with his two sons. Millie, carrying BABY SARAH, and Jesse follow closely behind.

SARAH

Papa has finally arrived! Millie, Jesse prepare a feast. Richard, stay with Willy and baby Sarah. Benny and I will greet Papa.

RICHARD

Let Millie look after the children.

SARAH

I need you to oversee matters.  
(to herself)  
If only Mama were alive...

Placing the baby with Richard, the servants re-enter the house. Benny leaps to his mother.

SARAH

At last, you will meet your Grandpapa!

BENNY

We shall give him our duty.

SARAH

We shall give him more than that...  
Tom, care to escort us?

EXT. DELAWARE RIVERFRONT (PENN'S LANDING) - MINUTES LATER

A jubilant crowd gathers. With Sarah by his side and Benny on his shoulders, Paine points to the proud DR. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, 69, and his gangly but good-looking grandson, TEMPLE FRANKLIN, 16, as they disembark the Pennsylvania Packet. Pulling out a pocket mirror, Temple pauses to admire himself.

TEMPLE

My father thinks Independency a rather foolish idea.

FRANKLIN

Not another word, Temple. And I remind you—he that falls in love with himself will have no rivals.

From shore, the rotund ROBERT MORRIS, 61, alerts Galloway.

MORRIS  
Over there, Mr. Galloway!

GALLOWAY  
I see him, Mr. Morris.

MORRIS  
After all these years, Dr. Franklin.

Dr. Franklin and Temple acknowledge the crowd. Sarah, Benny, and Paine penetrate the throngs. With Benny tailing her, Sarah dashes into her father arms. A Fife and Drum Corps plays, "Yankee Doodle."

SARAH  
Papa! Papa!

FRANKLIN  
Sally? My little, uh, womanly Sally.

SARAH  
Oh, Papa. Is it really you?  
Mama and I never thought...

Releasing her, Franklin stoops to meet his namesake. Benny bows.

FRANKLIN  
Who do we have here?  
(lifting him)  
This must be Deborah's "little  
Kingbird." Temple, the gift.

Dumping his luggage on Paine, Temple opens a small trunk.

FRANKLIN  
You have your Grandmamma's eyes.

Smiling broadly, Benny hugs his grandfather. Franklin snaps his fingers. An annoyed Temple hands him a kite. The Doctor presents it to Benny. The boy unfurls "Kingbird" to a receptive crowd.

FRANKLIN  
(putting Benny down)  
Temple, take your cousin. Teach  
him to fly.

Catching Temple off-guard, Sarah attempts to hug him. He resists.

SARAH  
Temple? I barely recognized you. You  
have grown into a handsome figure.

TEMPLE  
(giving her the once over)  
Likewise, Aunt Sally.

Franklin, greeting his colleagues, marches them homeward. The boys, flying "Kingbird," trail them—as does Sarah.

FRANKLIN  
Gentlemen, what news do you bring?

MORRIS  
You have heard about the Battles?

FRANKLIN  
(stopping)  
What battles, Mr. Morris?

MORRIS  
At Lexington and Concord. Forty-nine Americans and two hundred seventy-three Englishmen lay dead.

FRANKLIN'S IMAGINATION - MASSACHUSETTS BATTLEFIELDS - DAY

Fresh blood and dead bodies mar a vast virgin field. A soiled and tattered British flag partially drapes a corpse.

BACK TO SCENE

Franklin and the crowd proceed slowly.

PAINE  
The resolve of the Colonists has never been stronger—

GALLOWAY  
Still, they remain loyal to the King.

MORRIS  
Dr. Franklin, Ben, in anticipation of your arrival, you have been elected to represent Pennsylvania in the Continental Congress.

A female admirer kisses Franklin's cheek.

FRANKLIN  
An honor indeed.

PAINE  
You have also been selected to serve on the Committee of Public Safety.

Sarah, rejoining her father—places his arm over her shoulder.

SARAH  
Oh Papa, you look splendid!

FRANKLIN  
Any word from William?

SARAH  
 (turning around)  
 Benny! Temple! We must hurry.

BENNY  
 Grandpapa! Grandpapa!

FRANKLIN  
 Have you heard from my son?

Paine and Morris back away.

SARAH  
 Can we not wait to discuss it?

FRANKLIN  
 No. Mr. Galloway?

GALLOWAY  
 As the Royal Governor of New Jersey,  
 William naturally supports the King.

FRANKLIN  
 (flinching)  
 My own son, a traitor to his people.

SARAH  
 You mustn't think—

Franklin glowers at Galloway, who disappears into the crowd.

FRANKLIN  
 This is not simply a matter of taxation. The King's army occupies our towns—his navy blockades our ports. He has spilt more American blood.

SARAH  
 You must try reasoning with William. Is family not more important?

FRANKLIN  
 My dear Deborah—

Blocking his path, Sarah tenderly places her hand on his face.

SARAH  
 Papa, I am Sarah—mother is gone.

FRANKLIN  
 Sarah, I am sorry—we'll discuss the matter in the morrow. Temple and I are hungry and feeling a bit weary.

SARAH  
 Of course, Papa. We are preparing a feast in your honor—

BENNY  
 (bypassing the crowd)  
 Grandpapa, I'm flying.

FRANKLIN  
 (to himself)  
 Like a kingbird.

INT./EXT. PENNSYLVANIA STATE HOUSE (INDEPENDENCE HALL) - NOON

The tower bell (Liberty Bell) tolls. Inside, Dr. Franklin clutches his cane—seeking relief from the gout and boredom as he sits in the Assembly Room during a meeting of the Second Continental Congress.

Through a nearby window, he observes "Kingbird" rising and falling at the whim of the wind. He reads a hand-delivered note.

INSERT - NOTE, DATED JUNE 7, 1776

"The New Jersey Assembly orders the immediate arrest of Governor William Franklin, son of Pennsylvania Patriot, Benjamin Franklin."

BACK TO SCENE

As a poised President Hancock pounds a gavel, the refined Mr. Lee stands. The Doctor focuses squarely on Lee.

HANCOCK  
 The Chair recognizes the gentleman  
 from Virginia, Richard Henry Lee.

LEE  
 Mr. President, on behalf of my fellow  
 Virginians, I propose the following  
 resolution: "That these United  
 Colonies are, and of right ought  
 to be, free and independent states."

A great commotion arises. Franklin scampers out. Catching up with Temple and Benny, he snatches the kite—setting it afloat. "Kingbird" ascends higher and higher.

EXT. HIGH STREET - DAY

"Kingbird" descends on a corner house. Dr. Franklin (with cane) and Benny reel it in. The plainly dressed THOMAS JEFFERSON, 32, appears.

FRANKLIN  
 Mr. Jefferson—my grandson, Benny.

BENNY  
 (bowing)  
 To your health, Master Jefferson.

JEFFERSON  
 (chuckling)  
 And to yours, Benny.

Sarah, chatting with friends, waves from across the street.

FRANKLIN

Do you see your Mama? Run along.

Benny, lowering his head, stumbles toward her.

JEFFERSON

Have you read "the Declaration?"

FRANKLIN

Have you heard, "The Hatter Story?"

Jefferson looks to Franklin as they stroll along the bustling street.

FRANKLIN

When I was a journeyman printer, one of my companions, a hatter, was about to open shop... He constructed an appropriate sign.

(dramatizes with his free hand)

It read, "John Thompson, Hatter, Makes And Sells Hats For Ready Money," with a figure of a hat subjoined. He submitted it to his friends for their approval.

(slows down)

The first erased "Hatter" owing to redundancy. A second eliminated "Makes" due to customer indifference. A third omitted "For Ready Money" for the owner refused all credit.

(gout flare-up stops him)

The caption then read, "John Thompson Sells Hats." "Sells Hats?" asked yet another. "No one expects you to give them away." Those words, too, were deleted... The final inscription read, "John Thompson" with the painted hat subjoined.

JEFFERSON

What will be left of the Declaration?

FRANKLIN

I suppose much of it will remain intact. It is a masterpiece.

JEFFERSON

And the Anti-slavery Clause?

FRANKLIN

Divisive. Your Southern Colleagues, no doubt, will attempt to strike it.

JEFFERSON

As I am a slave owner, they shall rightly think me a hypocrite... Perhaps, I should remove it first.

FRANKLIN

Friend—I, too, am a slaveholder. But as we seek to abolish British tyranny, should we not seek to abolish our own?

Whispering, Jefferson opens the State House door for his mentor.

JEFFERSON

Opposition from Southern Delegates could doom the United States forever.

FRANKLIN

So, too, slavery.

INT. FRANKLIN COURT HOUSE - BLUE ROOM - DAY

At his desk, Dr. Franklin (wearing bifocals) prepares a letter dated July 8, 1776. Sarah dusts her father's armonica. Richard reads a gazette. Benny and Willy play "soldiers."

SARAH

Remember playing the armonica at William's wedding? We had such fun.

FRANKLIN

If my invention ever contributed to his satisfaction, then I am sorry.

SARAH

Home nearly a year and still you have barely spoken to him.

RICHARD

All in due time.

The Doctor fixates on a portrait of a young boy hanging on the wall.

SARAH (OS)

Temple has sent word of his father's imminent arrest. His stepmother—your only daughter-in-law—is distraught.

FLASHBACK - BLUE ROOM - NIGHT - THIRTY-THREE YEARS AGO

FRANKIE FRANKLIN, 4, a dead ringer for Benny, plays "soldiers" with William, 7. In his chair, Franklin, 37, reads a book. From the sofa, Deborah, 37, screams in horror as Frankie convulses on the floor.

DEBORAH

Frankie? Frankie!

BACK TO PRESENT

The Doctor looks at Benny, then glances back at the painting.

SARAH  
Your only son to rot in a jail.

FRANKLIN  
He is not my only son... Ever notice  
how much Benny favors little Frankie?

SARAH  
I thought a lot of little Frankie  
when baby Sarah died last month.

Sealing the letter, the Doctor removes his spectacles, and with a pained grimace, grabs his cane. He hands Richard the envelope.

RICHARD  
Why have you reminded her?

FRANKLIN  
Please deliver this post haste...  
Benny, care to join me?

As the Doctor consoles Sarah, Benny grabs "Kingbird."

FRANKLIN  
No kite today.

SARAH  
Be sure to behave yourself. Your  
Grandpapa is not feeling well.

Putting "Kingbird" away, Benny pecks his mother's cheek.

EXT. CHESTNUT STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Walking hand-in-hand, Dr. Franklin and Benny witness a man lashing a slave. Benny looks away. The Doctor intervenes with his cudgel.

FRANKLIN  
Young man, you would not burn your  
house--so why whip your slave?

Down the road, they greet DR. HARTMAN MARKOE, 45, and his adorable daughter, MARGARET MARKOE, 6. Benny winks at her. She gushes.

KUHN  
Is it true, Dr. Franklin? Are the  
Colonies to become independent?

FRANKLIN  
With the help of citizens like you,  
Dr. Markoe--and little Margaret, too.

BENNY  
Grandpapa, what is "indepedet?"

FRANKLIN  
In-de-pen-dence, Benny, means  
living apart from old mother  
England and mad father George.

BENNY  
In-de-pen-dence.

His grandfather nods, then points to a nest of chirping birds.

FRANKLIN  
See the birds nestled in the tree...  
(struggling to lift him)  
They have not yet learned to fly, so  
they cannot gather their food.

BENNY  
They need a Mama and Papa-like me.

FRANKLIN  
(almost dropping him)  
Indeed. When birds fly free-

BENNY  
Look Grandpapa! What are they  
doing to poor Dr. Kearsley?

Aiming bayonets at him—a mob encircles DR. KEARSLEY, 60.

MOB  
Traitor, rascal—tar and feather him.

KEARSLEY  
I have done nothing wrong.

FRANKLIN  
(breaking through the mob)  
Dr. Kearsley brought some of you into  
this world—and nursed others of you back  
to health. Is this how you repay him?

MOB  
Another Loyalist, Isaac Hunt.

The mob chases the pint-sized HUNT, 40. Franklin signals Kearsley.

KEARSLEY  
Much obliged, Ben—and how is your son?

FRANKLIN  
Fitting you should ask, Dr. Kearsley.  
William has been arrested for treason.

KEARSLEY  
You do not think that I—

The mob heaves Hunt onto a wagon while an offbeat band lampoons him.

FRANKLIN

Be careful on which side of the  
line you fall.

AT THE STATE HOUSE

As the bell rings, Kearsley disappears. Jefferson approaches.

FRANKLIN

Benny has been contemplating the  
meaning of Independence. Perhaps,  
someday, you will instruct him.

JEFFERSON

The honor would be mine.

The trio moves to the East Wing holding area. Patriots gather  
at the front entrance. The bell rings again.

FRANKLIN

Where are the Aristocrats?

Jefferson, spotting Hancock and the portly John Adams, elbows the  
Doctor. The men exchange greetings—avoiding public attention.

FRANKLIN

President Hancock, Mr. Adams, I  
present my grandson, Benny.

ADAMS

(bending his knees)

I have a son your age, John Quincy.  
We live in Braintree, Massachusetts.

BENNY

Next time, bring Johnny with you.  
I shall show him Philadelphia.

Adams pats the boy on the head. The bell rings a third time.  
Fife and drum permeate the air.

HANCOCK

Col. Nixon is about to begin.

With one hand, Benny clutches his grandfather's fingers—with  
the other, he squeezes his (own) crotch.

FRANKLIN

Hold on, Benny, history is about—

As the fierce and fiery COLONEL NIXON, 49, reads the Declaration  
of Independence, the American flag makes its dramatic debut.

NIXON

"When in the course of human events  
it becomes necessary for one people  
to dissolve the political bonds..."

The crowd roars its approval. Benny fidgets about.

NIXON

"...We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness..."

Euphoria sets in. Franklin points Benny to a privy, then shakes his colleagues.

INT. FRANKLIN COURT HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Dr. Franklin, Benny, Sarah, Jane, Richard, and Paine say, "Amen," lift their bowed heads, and dine. Sarah grips Jane's hand.

SARAH

Once again, Aunt Jane, you have safely found your way from Boston.

PAINE

You would have been a prize catch for the British.

FRANKLIN

(raising his wine goblet)  
A toast to my favorite sister—the courageous and crafty Jane Mecom.

JANE

And to my favorite brother, the most gifted of my sixteen siblings.

SARAH

(clearing her throat)  
Richard has agreed to serve on the Correspondence Committee.

PAINE

A brave endeavor, Richard.

RICHARD

Your "Common Sense," Sir, has inspired us all... Papa, you are aware that Mr. Paine almost died on his voyage from England?

PAINE

If Dr. Franklin had not sponsored my migration, Dr. Kearsley might never have rescued me at port.

FRANKLIN

Did you say, "Dr. Kearsley?"

Paine nods. Momentarily distracted, the Doctor toasts him.

FRANKLIN

You have blazed the trail of  
Revolution, Tom.

PAINÉ

The cause of America is, in large  
measure, the cause of mankind.

JANE

Sally, too, has caught the spirit.  
She is organizing a group of women.

FRANKLIN

Splendid—tell me more.

Millie slips in and ruffles Benny's hair. He winks at her as she  
clears the table of its excess and leaves. The adults whisper.

SARAH

We suspect Millie of spying.

FRANKLIN

Have you any proof?

SARAH

On more than one occasion, Richard  
has found your mail unsealed.

RICHARD

We ruled her out initially. However,  
yesterday, as I entered your room...

FLASHBACK - FRANKLIN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Richard observes Millie hovering above the Doctor's desk—sorting  
the mail. As she looks over her shoulder, he ducks. Richard then  
watches her unseal an envelope, read its contents, and sneak out  
the back door.

BACK TO PRESENT

SARAH

She has been instructed that Papa's  
room is strictly off-limits.

PAINÉ

Curiously enough, she claims to be  
illiterate—unusual for a free  
African from England.

Millie re-enters and refreshes the Doctor's drink. He pulls a  
letter from his vest.

FRANKLIN

Millie, I seem to have misplaced my bifocals. Please read this note.

MILLIE

Of course, Dr. Franklin. It reads, "London, June 23, 1776. Dearest Ben--"

Millie looks at the faces around the table. Franklin puts on his spectacles. She runs off.

SARAH

Millie, Richard and I would like--

BENNY

(racing after her)

Millie's no spy. Millie's no spy!

SARAH

Benny, come back!

FRANKLIN

Let him go--better he is not here.

All eyes focus on the Doctor.

FRANKLIN

Confidentially, Congress has requested my services in Paris. I am to secure a formal French Alliance.

Jane drops a fork on her plate.

JANE

With all due respect, Ben, you are not a young man--such a trip would be dangerous.

PAINE

Should your ship be captured, you would be at the King's mercy.

SARAH

You are not leaving us again, Papa.

FRANKLIN

Indeed I am--I have given Congress my word... I intend to take Temple.

SARAH

(rising)

Have you his father's permission?

FRANKLIN

I have written William and Temple. I also wish to take Benny.

SARAH  
Oh Papa, I think not! Richard?

RICHARD  
(stands)  
Absolutely not. He is only six.

FRANKLIN  
Listen to reason—then decide. It is true such a trip would be risky, but Captain Wickes of the Reprisal possesses a fine reputation—

SARAH  
Papa—

FRANKLIN  
Allow me to finish. Over the next few years, Paris is likely to be a far safer haven than Philadelphia.

RICHARD  
(sits)  
The Doctor has a point.

FRANKLIN  
Benny will receive the finest education—mingle with the brightest minds of Europe—learn French, study philosophy. I will take charge of him spiritually and materially.

SARAH  
(sits)  
You will not take no for an answer.

FRANKLIN  
My daughter knows me only too well.

JANE  
I suspect she despises your stubbornness.

RICHARD  
She also adores your stubbornness. I, on the other hand, do not... Sorry you must endure this, Tom.

Paine, gulping his wine, gestures sympathetically.

JANE  
But Benny is only a boy. He needs the affections of family.

FRANKLIN  
Am I not family?

Jesse reluctantly enters.

JESSE  
Millie's runnin' away and a strange  
man's askin' for Dr. Franklin.

SARAH  
Bring him in, Jesse.

JESSE  
He refuses to come in or identify  
hissself.

RICHARD  
(pulling out a pipe)  
I will tend to them.

FRANKLIN  
Allow me—it will give you a chance  
to discuss matters.

INT./EXT. FRANKLIN COURT HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Cudgel in hand, Dr. Franklin rushes toward the back door. Millie darts for the doorway—attempting to avoid him. The Doctor grabs her arm, then nabs the straggling Benny.

FRANKLIN  
You have lost your home, your  
honor, and the affections of this  
little boy. The shame is yours.

MILLIE  
Though I am not a slave, Jesse  
is—and that, Doctor, is your shame.

She loosens his grip—escaping into the evening fog. Holding the sobbing Benny in place, Franklin looks at Millie as she and the stranger on a horse exchange knowing glances. The fog lifts. Benny keeps watch from the house as the Doctor steps outside.

FRANKLIN  
William? I thought you were in jail.

William jumps down.

WILLIAM  
Where I belong?

FRANKLIN  
You belong with your family.

WILLIAM  
How dare you lure Temple to Paris  
without my permission. Is it not  
enough you have raised him thus far?

FRANKLIN

He has been offered a salaried position as my personal secretary.

WILLIAM

You have bribed him away just when his stepmother needed him most.

FRANKLIN

You betrayed me—first by becoming a lawyer, then by behaving as an Aristocrat. Success has ruined many a man.

WILLIAM

Observe thyself. It is always about you, anyway, is it not?

FRANKLIN

It is about something far greater than us—liberty, virtue, posterity—

WILLIAM

Posterity? Future generations will never know of your failed rebellion.  
(calming his whinnying horse)  
You do not really believe the British Empire can be defeated? King George has offered an olive branch. I suggest you take it.

FRANKLIN

Open your eyes. America's Revolution is sweeping across the land and will one day eliminate despots in every nation on earth. Advancing this cause has become the greatest mission of my life.

WILLIAM

And the most foolish! Just ask your protégé—Galloway.

FRANKLIN

Galloway? You are my protégé.

WILLIAM

At seventy, you have earned the respect of nations and of kings. Why risk your reputation now?

FRANKLIN

Revolution is the only course left to the Colonies. Once rid of European notions of monarchy and class, the American nation will rise on the wings of freedom and merit.

FRANKLIN (Cont'd)

From this day forward, kings shall be kings if the people say they shall be kings... What of Temple?

WILLIAM

Temple is free to pursue his own destiny. I will never forsake him. Unfortunately, however, he is not free of your manipulation... And I am not your protégé. I would have never abandoned my wife and family—leaving us with false hopes of your return.

FRANKLIN

Where are your wife and son now?

WILLIAM

You never approved of Elizabeth.

FRANKLIN

You never approved of Richard Bache.

WILLIAM

I thought he was after your money.

FRANKLIN

I thought you might have found a more practical wife.

William walks his horse to the archway. The Doctor pursues him.

FRANKLIN

And I never forsook my family. I did my duty—but you have turned your back—

WILLIAM

(facing his father)

Tell me, has my illegitimacy ever shamed you?

FRANKLIN

Never.

WILLIAM

Has Temple's?

FRANKLIN

You are my offspring—my legacy. You are Franklins.

WILLIAM

And I will honor the Franklin name as I see fit.

William mounts his horse and vanishes. The Doctor wipes away a tear.

FLASHBACK - SHEPHERD'S FARM - DAY - TWENTY-TWO YEARS AGO

Amidst an electrical storm, Dr. Franklin, 48, carefully ties a key to the end of a kite. A gangly William, 20, reaches for it.

FRANKLIN  
Patience William.

WILLIAM  
The storm will not last all day,  
Papa. Allow me—

With Franklin observing from a shed, William sets the kite aloft. Lightning strikes. Father and son exchange enormous smiles.

BACK TO PRESENT

Benny takes his grandfather's hand and leads him home.

FRANKLIN  
We have both lost loved ones tonight.

EXT./INT. STATE HOUSE - DAY (AUGUST 2, 1776)

Sarah and Benny draw near an open window.

SARAH  
You will be traveling by ship.

BENNY  
How long will I be gone?

SARAH  
If only I knew. Your Grandpapa  
will take good care of you.

BENNY  
Will war come to France?

SARAH  
(dropping to one knee)  
I pray not. Paris should be far  
safer than Philadelphia.

BENNY  
But Mama, I will be lonesome for you.

SARAH  
(bear hugging him)  
We must do our part for the Revolution.

BENNY  
What is my part?

SARAH  
To assist your Grandpapa in any  
way... Let's spy on him.

Benny's face lights up as Sarah gives him a boost under the ajar window. Leaning his head into an Assembly Room full of delegates, he witnesses CHARLES CARROLL, 38, solemnly signing the Declaration.

FRANKLIN

There go a few million pounds.

HANCOCK

Charles Carroll is a common name in Maryland—and since this Carroll is the richest of the lot, and a Catholic to boot, the King will never suspect him.

Carroll retrieves the quill and adds his address.

INSERT - DECLARATION, "CHARLES CARROLL OF CARROLLTON"

CARROLL

Gentlemen, we must all hang together.

FRANKLIN

Or we will assuredly hang separately.

The scene dissolves into the "Signers of the Declaration."

EXT. MARCUS HOOK, PA - DELAWARE RIVER - AUTUMN DAY

Sarah (pregnant), Richard, and Willy send-off Benny (carrying "Kingbird"), Dr. Franklin, and Temple aboard the Reprisal. Captain Lambert Wickes, now 29, tips hat before boarding ship.

SARAH

Captain Wickes, half my family rests in your care.

WICKES

My word on their safe delivery, Mrs. Bache.

Sarah reaches out to her father.

SARAH

We beseech God to protect you.

FRANKLIN

Beseech Him if you must, but do not be disappointed. Though He set the world in motion, He left the rest to us...

As the Franklins bid each other farewell, Sarah, tearing-up, hugs Benny.

SARAH

Do not cause your Grandpapa, or the Captain, a moment of trouble.

BENNY  
Mama, must I go? I am not ready  
to be independent.

SARAH  
Remember your part in the Revolution.  
Your Grandpapa needs your affection.

The three adventurers march away. Benny, lagging behind, gives his kite to Willy. Richard hugs his wife. The Doctor turns around.

FRANKLIN  
Richard, write me in code—and tell no one of our whereabouts. Sarah, enroll Jesse in school, take good care of the tenant houses, and keep up your spirits—a great deal depends on it.

RICHARD  
You can rely on us.

The Doctor grabs Benny's hand. Looking back, Benny waves to Willy.

EXT. THE REPRISAL ON THE ATLANTIC - DUSK

The Captain peers through a telescope and spots two British Vessels. Nearby, Dr. Franklin and Benny throw a thermometer overboard.

WICKES  
Success with your experiment, Doctor?

FRANKLIN  
Indeed. Captain, I seem to have misplaced my telescope, could we borrow—

WICKES  
(handing it over)  
The enemy is encroaching.

Using the scope, the Doctor finds the sloops. Benny, tugging at him, gestures for a peak—eventually prevailing.

BENNY  
Captain, does this mean war?

FRANKLIN  
Hush, Benny—why haven't they struck?

WICKES  
They have been uncertain of the Reprisal's cargo and direction..

FRANKLIN  
And now they know.

WICKES  
Have I permission to strike first?

As the Doctor sternly nods, Temple approaches. Benny races to him.

BENNY  
The Captain says we are to strike  
the British—look!

TEMPLE  
(grabbing the scope)  
Finally—after four weeks of nothing—

FRANKLIN  
Come boys, we must brace ourselves.

WICKES  
I could use Temple's assistance.

FRANKLIN  
I am afraid, Captain, he is not  
quite up to it.

TEMPLE  
According to the great Dr. Franklin,  
I shall never be up to it.

Temple slams the scope into the Doctor's hand and heads below.

SERIES OF SHOTS - BATTLE OF THE SEAS

- A) As night falls, the Reprisal's sixteen cannons attack the Vine and the Success.
- B) Guns, artillery, and dynamite light up the sky.
- C) In the wee morning hours, the American crew sinks one vessel and partially destroys the other.

EXT. THE REPRISAL AT SEA - DAWN

British crews and cargo are rounded-up. On deck, Benny leaps into the Captain's arms. Dr. Franklin slowly advances.

BENNY  
I was not a bit scared—we pounded 'em.

FRANKLIN  
A splendid effort, Captain.

BENNY  
Can we do it again?

WICKES  
(setting Benny down)  
The good news—we are days ahead of  
schedule. The bad news—

FRANKLIN  
Run along now, Benny.

Heading for the bridge, Benny spots the chained prisoners.

BENNY  
Kill the scapegraces!  
(enthusiasm waning)  
Kill them...

The Reprisal sails courageously across the Atlantic.

EXT. FRANCE - SHORES OF AURAY - NIGHT

The Captain bids adieu to Dr. Franklin (sporting a fur cap) and his grandsons. A willowy blonde, MADAME CHAUMONT, 45, and light rain greet them. (French characters speak English with French accents.)

MADAME CHAUMONT  
Bonsoir, Dr. Franklin.

FRANKLIN  
Madame Chaumont?

MADAME CHAUMONT  
Oui. The carriage to Passy awaits.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE OF PASSY (SUBURBAN PARIS) - CONTINUOUS

The coach, carrying the foursome, travels night and day, driving through Nantes, past the Palais De Versailles (with its French flags flapping), around Le Bois Boulogne, and behind the Cathedrale Eglise D'Autéuil. Along the way, the Franklin men admire the ladies.

MADAME CHAUMONT (OS)  
All arrangements are complete. My husband has scrupulously promoted your arrival. Madame Helvétius will introduce you to Minister Vergennes. He, in turn, shall present you to the King of France.

EXT./INT. HÔTEL DE VALENTINOIS (PASSY HOTEL) - SNOWY CHRISTMAS EVE

The grand hotel sits majestically off the banks of the Seine. In its stately dining room, the Franklins enjoy a feast. Temple ogles a busty, sumptuous-looking CHAMBERMAID as she mistakenly enters.

CHAMBERMAID  
Pardon.

TEMPLE  
(pulling out his pocket mirror)  
May I be excused?

FRANKLIN  
After you have taken a dictation from me wishing your Aunt Sally a Happy New Year.

TEMPLE  
I will fetch my quill.

Putting on bifocals, the Doctor retrieves a letter from his vest. With a mouth full of food, Benny looks up from his plate and drifts over to his grandfather—brushing against him to peek at the words.

FRANKLIN

From your Mama, wishing us a Happy Christmas... It seems Jesse has adjusted well to school... And the women of Philadelphia have raised over \$250,000 and sewn nearly 2,000 shirts for Gen. Washington's army.

BENNY

And Papa?

FRANKLIN

Appointed Postmaster General.

BENNY

Will the English destroy Philadelphia?

FRANKLIN

(hugging Benny)

Never. Voltaire says, "Philadelphia reminds us that all men are brothers."

A jittery BUTLER, 52, bursts into the room.

BUTLER

Dr. Franklin, you have a visitor.

IN THE BEDROOM

Temple gapes at the Chambermaid as she turns down a quilt.

TEMPLE

Parlez-vous Anglais?

She retreats to the edge of the bed. He ensnares her.

TEMPLE

Your movements are enchanting.  
Let me taste—uh—test you.

CHAMBERMAID

(blushing)

Monsieur Franklin.

He buries his face in her exposed cleavage and devours her.

IN THE DINING ROOM

Dr. Franklin and Benny greet the round and balding PROFESSEUR LECOEUR, 49.

FRANKLIN

Prof. LeCoeur—an honor indeed.

LECOEUR  
 Dr. Franklin. Master Bache? I am  
 most humbled. Happy Christmas.

As the Doctor and Benny take their places, the Butler seats the  
 Professeur and pours him wine—leaving the bottle nearby.

FRANKLIN  
 Benny, this spring you will study  
 French culture at the Professor's  
 boarding school.

BENNY  
 I look forward to it, Master LeCoeur.

FRANKLIN  
 (chiding Benny)  
 Professor LeCoeur.

LECOEUR  
 Yes.

The Doctor turns to LeCoeur, who is refilling his empty glass.

FRANKLIN  
 I was correcting Benny... Why not  
 join us tonight? Someone let it out  
 that I like the ladies—and the ladies  
 of France keep presenting themselves.

LECOEUR  
 (guzzling his wine)  
 I shant mix business with pleasure.  
 You are aware of the expenses?

AT THE DOOR/FOYER

Madame Chaumont, MADAME BRILLON, 39, a voluptuous, red-haired  
 widow, and their striking, twenty-something daughters,  
 MESDEMOISELLES BRILLON and CHAUMONT, playfully knock.

BUTLER  
 Dr. Franklin! Your company!

The Butler opens the door and takes their coats. The Doctor and  
 Benny appear.

FRANKLIN  
 Ladies, Joyeux Noel.

MADAME CHAUMONT  
 In my husband's absence, I present  
 my daughter, Michelle, Madame and  
 Mademoiselle Brillon, and this—  
 (dangling a Franklin pendant)  
 Your likeness appears everywhere.

While kissing the Brillons' cheeks, Franklin snatches the pendant. He then directs the women into the Yuletide decorated drawing room and turns to Benny.

FRANKLIN

It is time to get ready for bed.

BENNY

But Grandpapa, can't I stay up?

A tipsy Professeur, with hat and coat, wobbles through the foyer.

LECOEUR

Au revoir, Doctor. Enjoy Paris.

FRANKLIN

Stay. Meet the ladies and my other grandson.

(clapping at Benny)

Fetch Temple for me.

LECOEUR

I cannot keep my carriage waiting.

As LeCoeur leaves, Benny returns. Peering through the ajar drawing room door, he observes his grandfather demonstrating the armonica for his guests. Madame Brillon teasingly sits on the Doctor's lap.

INT./EXT. PARIS - LA CATHEDRALE NOTRE DAME - SNOWY CHRISTMAS DAY

The splendor of Christmas rests upon the altar. As the choir sings "Les Anges Dans Nos Campagnes," the Cardinal consecrates the creche and the congregants. The aging, Bohemian beauty, MADAME HELVÉTIUS, 60, and her cortege vacate the front pew. The flock follows behind.

Madame stops in the aisle to greet Dr. Franklin. Clutching his cane, he winks at Benny and Temple. Madame extends her hand.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS

Mon cher ami, are you my Christmas present?

FRANKLIN

(kissing her hand)

Oui, Madame Helvétius—and you—mine.

Madame and her entourage usher themselves out of the church and into carriages. The Franklins watch from the top steps.

EXT./INT. PARIS - LE PALAIS ROYAL (ROYAL PALACE) - NEW YEAR'S EVE

The Franklins assist the Brillons and the Chaumonts out of their carriage. The merrymakers pause to admire the fireworks. String music underscores the revelry.

FRANKLIN

Ladies, boys, it is nearing midnight.

Inside, they remove their coats. The Doctor's presence creates a sensation. Opposite them, another celebrity is causing a stir. Devotees corner the gaunt and ethereal VOLTAIRE, 85.

MADAME CHAUMONT

Voltaire is presently across the room.  
We must pay our respects.

The Mesdames maneuver the Franklin party through a bespectacled crowd. The Philosophers take measure of each other and bow. Onlookers appear disappointed. Madame Brillon prompts the Doctor to hug Voltaire. They kiss cheek to cheek. Onlookers ardently applaud.

FRANKLIN

My namesake, Benjamin Franklin Bache.

Voltaire places his hand on Benny's forehead.

VOLTAIRE

Dieu vous bénisse—God and liberty.

At midnight, the church bells of Paris ring. The attendees embrace one another. Temple kisses Mademoiselle Brillon.

EXT./INT. PASSY - HELVÉTIUS ESTATE - DAY

Dr. Franklin, the poker-faced French Foreign Minister, VERGENNES, 61, and Madame Helvétius stroll through a winter garden. A SPY stalks them.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS

Minister Vergennes, Dr. Franklin has  
conquered my heart—do not let him  
conquer France.

VERGENNES

I believe he already has.

FRANKLIN

My mission is to negotiate better  
trade relations between our nations.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS

(shivering)

Perhaps, you should continue your  
dialogue inside—over some wine.

VERGENNES

It will not alter our discussion. As  
a nation, America must prove herself.

Leading her guests to the house, Madame shrugs her shoulders. The Doctor, looking about, spots the spy hiding in shrubs.

FRANKLIN

As a formal trading partner, America  
has already proven herself.

VERGENNES  
Is it formal trade or formal  
recognition America seeks?

As they slip thru a side door, the Doctor notices the spy is gone.

IN THE DRAWING ROOM

They sit at a table. Madame's lap dog finds its natural place.

FRANKLIN  
America is a virgin state seeking  
only honorable suitors...

MADAME HELVÉTIUS  
(hugging the Doctor's neck)  
Ben knows a great deal about virgins.

FRANKLIN  
I am like a grandfather trying to  
arrange an appropriate marriage  
for his granddaughter.

VERGENNES  
Do not play coy with me, Doctor.

A maid serves wine.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS  
Ben plays coy with everyone.

VERGENNES  
It is the only game he can play—  
unless the Americans actually win  
a battle or two. His populist  
notion of liberty not only  
threatens the British Crown—  
(pounding his cup down)  
but also the French King.

The dog, barking, escorts Vergennes out.

FRANKLIN  
Honest and direct—honorable  
qualities—a man I can trust.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS  
And rude... Not even a toast to the  
United States. All of France is in  
your corner and he knows it.

FRANKLIN  
America needs more than lip service.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS  
(kissing the Doctor)  
And you?

INT. PARIS - PROFESSEUR LECOEUR'S CLASSROOM - SPRING DAY

Standing before classmates in Quaker garb, Benny becomes fodder for FRANÇOIS, 9, and LOUIS, 8.

FRANÇOIS  
Le garçon American porte  
des haillons.

SUBTITLES  
The American boy wears rags.

LOUIS  
Une créature à l'aspect idiot.

SUBTITLES  
A silly looking creature.

FRANÇOIS  
Parlez-vous Français?

SUBTITLES  
Do you speak French?

BENNY  
Oui. Polly vu Francais.

As they mock his mispronunciation, the Professeur appears.

LECOEUR  
Assez! C'est le protégé de  
l'illustre Dr. Franklin.

SUBTITLES  
Enough! This is the protégé of  
the illustrious Dr. Franklin.

François and Louis snicker.

LECOEUR  
Not to worry, Benny. François and  
Louis will practice French with you  
everyday. François et Louis va  
pratiquer avec vous chaque jour.

They roll their eyes.

LECOEUR  
Nous devrions tous éduquer  
Benny ausujet des vêtements  
adéquats et des usages  
Français. Les enfants, com-  
mencez à prier Notre Père.

SUBTITLES  
We shall all teach Benny  
proper French attire, customs,  
and language... Boys, begin  
by reciting "The Our Father."

The boys stand, face a Crucifix, and bless themselves. Benny awkwardly imitates their actions.

MONTAGE - BENNY ADJUSTS TO FRENCH LIFE

- A) Wearing French wigs and costumes, Benny, François, and Louis take dancing lessons.
- B) Dressed in brown buckskin breeches, Benny learns to ride a horse. His new companions cheer him.
- C) With his friends watching, Benny attempts to hit a bird with a stone-breaking a window instead. His friends flee. He gets caught.

INT. PARIS - MADAME BRILLON'S SALON - AUTUMN DAY

Madame Brillon plays a melancholy song on her piano. Benny and Temple approach. Across the room, Dr. Franklin amuses female admirers before encountering Vergennes.

MADAME BRILLON  
Why does your Grandpapa toy with them?

TEMPLE  
(sitting next to her)  
Are you jealous, Madame?

MADAME BRILLON  
I do not like sharing him with  
other members of my sex.

TEMPLE  
He thinks of you as his daughter.

MADAME BRILLON  
And I imagine him to be my Papa...  
What brings you to my salon?

BENNY  
Terrible news from home.

MADAME BRILLON  
What news could be so awful?

TEMPLE  
My stepmother has died... I should  
have stayed with her in America.

MADAME BRILLON  
(taking his hand)  
You must not blame yourself.

Hiding his tears, Temple rises. Franklin and Vergennes advance. Mademoiselle Brillon emerges from their path.

BENNY  
Madame, rumor has it that British  
troops have surrounded Philadelphia  
and taken Franklin Court.

VERGENNES  
To put it more bluntly, Gen. Howe  
has captured Philadelphia-

FRANKLIN  
You, Sir, have it backwards-  
Philadelphia has captured Gen. Howe.

VERGENNES  
Either way, it does not bode well  
for a Franco-American Alliance.

Replacing Temple on the bench, the Doctor kisses Madame's cheeks. She is distracted by Temple's sudden departure with her daughter.

FRANKLIN  
A duet, my child?

MADAME BRILLON  
Mon cher, Papa.

They play an upbeat tune. Vergennes grins at their bravado.

INT./EXT. PASSY HOTEL - A FEW DAYS LATER

Dr. Franklin rests in a chair.

FLASHBACK/DAYDREAM - FRANKLIN COURT BEDROOM - THIRTY-TWO YEARS AGO

Little Frankie lies in bed. The Doctor checks his son's pulse and looks upward.

FRANKLIN  
Please do not extinguish his flame.  
He is the light of my life.

BACK TO PRESENT

Hearing a cabriolet, the Doctor awakens. He and Benny grab their coats and scurry down the garden steps to greet Temple.

FRANKLIN  
Is it true? Have the British taken  
Philadelphia?

TEMPLE  
And Franklin Court—but the Baches  
managed to escape...

The Doctor turns away, puts his face in his hands, and weeps. Benny consoles him.

TEMPLE  
You should also know that Gen.  
Burgoyne has surrendered at Saratoga.

They turn around.

FRANKLIN  
Do my ears deceive me or do you?

TEMPLE  
Neither. American forces have  
defeated the British at Saratoga.

FRANKLIN  
(lifting his head)  
Thanks be to God... Boys, quickly  
dispatch the news.

INT. PASSY HOTEL - DRAWING ROOM - DAY

Sitting on a sofa full of wigs, a prissy, pugnacious WIGMAKER, 37, measures Dr. Franklin's head. Benny and Temple observe.

WIGMAKER  
You must be deprived of wigs in  
America?

FRANKLIN  
In America, we make men—not wigs.

Grinning, Temple hands his grandfather a pocket mirror. After each fitting, the Doctor examines himself.

FRANKLIN  
Perhaps, your wigs are too small.

WIGMAKER  
Perhaps, your head is too big.

Both cousins snicker.

BENNY  
It is worn like this, Grandpapa.

TEMPLE  
Let King Louis see your natural hair.  
It will not foil the Alliance.

The Doctor dismisses the wigmaker with a gesture. The latter leaves in a huff. The Franklins howl with laughter.

EXT./INT. PALACE OF VERSAILLES - DAY (MARCH 20, 1778)

Peasants swarm Dr. Franklin as he steps from his carriage. Seeing he is wigless and wearing a brown Quaker suit, they salute him as "Citizen Franklin" and the "Apostle of Liberty." Benny and Temple, dressed more dully, follow without fanfare. (French and American flags adorn the outside walls.)

INSIDE THE PALACE

An appalled chamberlain stops Dr. Franklin. From behind, Vergennes ushers the Doctor and his grandsons into the King's reception room. Before a bevy of nobility, Franklin bows his head to KING LOUIS, 24, and MARIE ANTOINETTE, 23.

KING LOUIS  
Assurez fermement le Parlement  
de mon Amitié.

SUBTITLES  
Firmly assure Congress of our  
friendship.

FRANKLIN  
Votre Majesté peut compter sur  
la gratitude du parlement, et  
sur son respect fidèle du  
traité.

SUBTITLES  
Your Majesty may count on the  
gratitude of Congress and its  
faithful observance of the  
Treaty.

Polite applause and full reception ensue. "Ladies of the Court" encircle the Doctor. The scene dissolves into the famed painting.

EXT. PASSY HOTEL - GARDEN - DAY

(July 4, 1778)

Lunching behind a table laden with American flags, flowers, fruits, potatoes, breads, cakes, and chickens—Madame Chaumont, John Adams, and a thin-faced, highbrowed brunette, ABIGAIL ADAMS, 39, fixate on Temple. With his back to them all, Dr. Franklin poses for the master sculptor, M. HOUDON, 37.

TEMPLE

Gen. Washington further writes, "I am supremely confident in our army. Your personal recommendations, Gen. Friedrich von Steuben and the Marquis de Lafayette, have performed brilliantly."

Temple, glimpsing a buxom maid as she serves lemonade, drops the letter, pulls out his pocket mirror, and primps his hair.

TEMPLE

Grandpapa, I wish to be excused.

FRANKLIN

Wait for Benny.

MADAME CHAUMONT

Patience is a virtue.

TEMPLE

But not so to lecture one on it.

Temple blows Madame a kiss. Adams leans toward Franklin.

ADAMS

Perhaps our military victories and diplomatic successes will bring King George to the table.

FRANKLIN

Precisely two years after we declared Independence? It is highly doubtful.

MRS. ADAMS

Is sitting for Houdon necessary?

Adams cautions his wife.

FRANKLIN

Do you think it vain, Abigail?

TEMPLE

(putting his mirror away)  
We all think it vain, Grandpapa.

HOUDON

Dr. Franklin, if I am to finish before your other guests arrive, you must sit still.

Dressed in Parisian attire, Benny dashes into the garden. The delicate, fair-haired American, JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, 11, follows. Benny bows in French style. The Doctor stands.

BENNY  
Bonjour.

JOHN QUINCY  
Happy Independence Day.

MADAME CHAUMONT  
Such gentlemen.

FRANKLIN  
How is my little Kingbird?

TEMPLE  
Your "French" Kingbird. He probably blesses himself and bows to the King.

Johnny sits next to his mother. Benny squeezes a chair between his grandfather and Madame Chaumont.

ADAMS  
Benny's transformation is remarkable.

MRS. ADAMS  
The boys look splendid...  
(tasting a potato wedge)  
Ben, you are so right to praise the French potato. It is simply delicious.

FRANKLIN  
Your family's addition to our humble embassy, Abigail, has greatly improved American prospects. John Quincy is presently the most gifted student in Europe—due to your efforts, no doubt.

MRS. ADAMS  
Dr. Franklin, you exaggerate. But I do appreciate your recognition of motherly virtues.

MADAME CHAUMONT  
(pinching Benny's cheek)  
I wish to keep Benny for myself—such a handsome French gentleman.

FRANKLIN  
Benny is foremost an American, a Presbyterian, and a Republican.

TEMPLE  
 (slowly clapping)  
 Bravo, Grandpapa! Aunt Sally would  
 be so proud.

FRANKLIN  
 I will put an end to this.

MADAME CHAUMONT  
 An end to what, Dr. Franklin?

BENNY  
 (stands)  
 Have I displeased you, Grandpapa?

Madame Helvétius, with her lap dog and cortege, splashes onto the scene. Stepping over the Adamses, she kisses Franklin on the lips. Mrs. Adams gasps. Madame sighs. The dog growls.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS  
 Ben, you promised to only invite  
 friends.

As Madame takes Benny's seat, Mrs. Adams raises her eyebrows, seizes her husband's arm, and nudges her son.

MRS. ADAMS  
 It is time for us to leave.

EXT./INT. PROFESSEUR LECOEUR'S SCHOOL - DAY

The tall, suave PHILABERT CRAMER, 33, assists Dr. Franklin out of a buggy. From a classroom, Benny sees his grandfather. The Doctor barges into the Professeur's office.

LECOEUR  
 Dr. Franklin, a most pleasant  
 surprise. What brings you?

Donning his school uniform, a winded Benny enters and bows.

LECOEUR  
 Master Bache, a perfect French  
 gentleman.

FRANKLIN  
 You do mean "American gentleman."

LECOEUR  
 Did you not wish him to be immersed  
 in French culture?

FRANKLIN  
 (turns to Benny)  
 I have decided to transfer you to a  
 school in Geneva.

BENNY  
Grand-père, dois-je partir?

FRANKLIN  
In English—please, Benny.

BENNY  
Grandpapa, must I leave? I have  
made friends here and you are near.

The Doctor slips LeCoeur an envelope.

FRANKLIN  
Professor, my deepest gratitude.  
(to Benny)  
Pack your bags. M. Cramer awaits us.

BENNY  
But, Grandpapa, what about my part  
in the Revolution?

EXT./INT. GENEVA - DE MARIGNAC HOUSE - DAY

From the Rhône, the hills rise steeply amid vivid Renaissance structures until reaching their peak—St. Peter's Cathedral. Nearby, Cramer escorts Benny to a three-story mansion. The pretty but stoic GOVERNANTE AIIRE, 25, greets them.

CRAMER  
Gouvernante Aiire, Je vous le  
petit-fils amène du le célèbre  
Dr. Franklin—Benjamin Franklin  
Bache.

SUBTITLES  
Gouvernante Aiire, I bring you  
the grandson of the celebrated  
Dr. Franklin—Benjamin Franklin  
Bache.

GOVERNANTE AIIRE  
Nous vous attendions.

SUBTITLES  
We have been expecting you.

Inside, Governante summons MONSIEUR DE MARIGNAC, 50, a frail, fêted French intellectual, and his plumpish wife, MADAME DE MARIGNAC, 45.

GOVERNANTE AIIRE  
Vos invités sont arrivés.

SUBTITLES  
Your guests have arrived.

DE MARIGNAC  
Benny—welcome. I am Gabriel de  
Marignac. My wife, Gallisard...

MADAME DE MARIGNAC  
C'est un plaisir. Nous allons  
servir le dîner bientôt.

SUBTITLES  
It is a pleasure. Dinner  
will be served shortly.

IN THE DINING ROOM

Madame seats Benny. De Marignac seats his wife, then himself. Benny observes Cramer sneaking into the kitchen.

MADAME DE MARIGNAC  
Avez-vous des frères où des  
Sœurs, Benny?

SUBTITLES  
Have you any siblings, Benny?

DE MARIGNAC  
Dear, we must honor Dr. Franklin's  
request to speak in English.

BENNY  
I have a brother—and a sister whom  
I have never met.

Benny watches as Cramer nibbles on Governante's ear.

MADAME DE MARIGNAC (OS)  
Our children are visiting their  
Grandmamma. We did not wish to  
overwhelm you on your first day.

Governante escapes Cramer's grasp and carries a carved duck into  
the dining room. Tailing her, Cramer takes a seat.

GOVERNANTE AIIRE  
Le dîner est servi.

MADAME DE MARIGNAC  
Where did you disappear to, M.  
Cramer?

CRAMER  
I was...sampling the dessert.

Benny smiles to himself. Cramer winks at him.

MADAME DE MARIGNAC  
After supper, Governante Aiiere will  
show you to your room.

BENNY  
Thank you, Madame.

DE MARIGNAC  
(proposing a toast)  
To Benjamin Franklin Bache and the  
American Revolution.

Benny braves another smile and it is contagious.

INT./EXT. DE MARIGNAC HOUSE - BENNY'S ROOM - RAINY DAY

Sitting at a desk, Benny lifts his buried head to finish a sketch  
of Dr. Franklin. He then writes, "August 27, 1778," on blank sheet.

BENNY (VO)  
Dear Grandpapa, tomorrow will be my  
ninth birthday, so to please you, I  
have remembered to date this letter.

Staring out the window, he becomes entranced by the steady rain.

BENNY (VO)

While I have only just arrived a week ago, I am lonesome for you. My classmates do not seem eager to be friends. Everyone else, though, welcomes me as if I were Dr. Franklin. They invite me to teas, balls, and plays.

(wiping away tears)

M. Cramer introduced me to the philosopher, Rousseau—now both men are dead. Since you admonished me last, I have written Mama and Papa. Loving, your grandson, Benny.

De Marignac knocks on the door and enters.

DE MARIGNAC

Benny, is something wrong?

BENNY

Mama said I must help Grandpapa win the Revolution. But how can I do so from here?

De Marignac sits on the edge of Benny's bed.

DE MARIGNAC

The American Revolution will linger on long after the war has ended and your Grandpapa has left this earth. A new generation of leaders will be needed to carry on the legacy. Your Grandpapa is preparing you. He has sent you here so that we might enlighten your mind, mold your character, and apprentice you to be a printer like him.

BENNY

I would rather be lawyer like Uncle William.

DE MARIGNAC

(smiling as he leaves)

Then a lawyer you shall be.

Again, Benny stares out the window. Rain changes to snow as the green summery landscape becomes a white wintry one. A maturing and handsome Benny, now 14, puts aside a drawing of his grandfather—then dates a letter, "March 7, 1783."

## FLASHBACK - SCENES FROM LETTER - BENNY'S POV

BENNY (VO)

Dear Grandpapa, the rebellion has quieted down, but French troops still occupy Geneva and parade about town. On the feast of St. Louis, they held a review discharging thirty pieces of cannon, firing a salvo of musketry, and letting-off Roman fire.

(dipping his quill in ink)

Yesterday, I witnessed the shooting of a poor Piedmontese soldier for stealing a few pennies. He was surrounded by his regiment and led forward by a priest. They sat him on a snowy slope and tied him to a pole. After blessing him, the priest backed away. On signal, the squad fired.

FADE TO BLACK

## FLASHBACK CONTINUED - SCENES FROM LETTER - BENNY'S POV

BENNY (VO)

Today, we boys, Johan, Jean, and I, planned our own execution-of a carnivorous cat which had killed our newborn guinea pig. Johan suggested revenge. As I was indignant, I eagerly agreed. We searched the snow-covered field and found the guilty party hovering over another pig's remains. I grabbed the animal by the throat-but when he meowed, I let him go.

BACK TO SCENE

Benny touches-up the drawing and completes his letter.

BENNY (VO)

I hear, my dear Grandpapa, that you are planning to ride a balloon this summer. As I have always wanted to fly, I ask a special favor-permit me to accompany you-or at the very least-come home to you.

## EXT./INT. PASSY - MADAME BRILLON'S ESTATE - DAY

On the veranda, the Doctor delights in the soothing mis-en-scène of the garden below. He drafts a letter dated "April 20, 1783."

FRANKLIN (VO)

Dear Benny, I received your touching letter and wish you to know that I look forward to your return.

FRANKLIN (Cont'd)  
 But as I am involved in the most  
 sensitive of negotiations, you must  
 stay put. I will send for you at  
 year's end.

Temple pops his head out an open window.

TEMPLE  
 Madame awaits you.

FRANKLIN  
 Splendid.

IN THE BEDROOM

Dr. Franklin takes his place at the chess table. Temple, lurking  
 behind him, gawks at Madame as she soaks in a covered bath.

MADAME BRILLON  
 Temple—pour hot water for me.

Fetching a pail from the fireplace, he readily empties it into the  
 tub.

MADAME BRILLON  
 Papa, I believe it is your move.

FRANKLIN  
 (eyeing his hostess)  
 That will be all, Temple.

Temple backs his way out the door.

MADAME BRILLON  
 Mon cher—mind the board.

FRANKLIN  
 (painfully shifts his body)  
 I am having trouble concentrating.

MADAME BRILLON  
 Due to your wandering eyes.

FRANKLIN  
 (moves his rook)  
 When I was young and enjoyed favors  
 from your sex, I never had the gout.

MADAME BRILLON  
 So female affection was the remedy?

FRANKLIN  
 If you had an ounce of the Christian  
 charity you so often speak of, you'd  
 favor me now and relieve my pain.

She splashes him with water, then positions her knight.

MADAME BRILLON

The sin in your eyes has so many  
branches and is repeated so often—

FRANKLIN

(his horse takes her queen)  
Madame mistakes sin for desire.

MADAME BRILLON

Something else is bothering you.

FRANKLIN

Benny wishes to come home.

MADAME BRILLON

After six years—it is certainly time.

FRANKLIN

It is certainly not the time. I fear  
I am losing my ability to concentrate.  
Benny will be a further distraction.

Madame grabs a towel, covers herself, and steps out of the tub.

MADAME BRILLON

Your whole life has been a testament  
to the importance of distractions...  
Could it be Benny is a reminder that  
your days in France are numbered?

FRANKLIN

I am too old to leave France and I  
am never leaving you.

Putting on a robe, Madame kisses his brow and sits next to him.

FRANKLIN

Despite Congress' instructions, Mr.  
Adams and Mr. Jay are insisting on a  
separate peace with England—without  
consulting France. After such an  
affront, how do I arrange for the six  
million livres we so urgently need?

MADAME BRILLON

Go to Vergennes. Use your powers  
of persuasion. The King will oblige—

FRANKLIN

If only you were her Majesty.

She corners his king with her knight.

MADAME BRILLON

I am now—checkmate.

EXT. PASSY HOTEL - DUSK

Dr. Franklin (with cane) and Vergennes stroll thru a rose garden.

VERGENNES

Your separate treaty with England  
is most favorable to your young  
nation... I fear, however, that you  
have achieved your success at the  
expense of France and our Alliance.

Leaning over a rose bush, the Doctor carefully snaps a branch with  
two roses and hands it to him.

FRANKLIN

These flowers embody our nations.  
France is in bloom. America is  
budding. Together, they are a  
thing of beauty.

While sniffing France, Vergennes pricks his middle finger.

VERGENNES

And the thorns, I suppose, represent  
the British.

FRANKLIN

Indeed. The pricks seek to pierce our  
alliance. But if the French were to-

VERGENNES

What more could my King do for you?

FRANKLIN

If his Majesty were to lend the  
United States an additional ten  
million livres, the British would  
realize their miscalculation.

INT./EXT. DE MARIGNAC HOUSE - DAY

Luggage in hand, Benny marches down the living room stairs.  
Governante Aiiere, the De Marignacs and their four children,  
tearfully hug him.

MADAME DE MARIGNAC

I pine your return.

GOVERNANTE AIIRE

Nous allons vous regretter  
vivemont.

SUBTITLES

We will dearly miss you.

The two men haul out the bags. An attractive mademoiselle pecks  
Benny's cheek. As Benny boards the coach, he embraces De Marignac.

BENNY

My Grandpapa will not be pleased.

DE MARIGNAC

Not at first. But soon he will be as happy as I am sad... Always remember, Benny, virtue is the foundation of every good character and every great nation. You will make a fine lawyer someday.

BENNY

If only I could be as good as you and my Grandpapa...

EXT./INT. THE STREETS OF VERSAILLES - SAME TIME

Dr. Franklin and John Adams travel by coach.

FRANKLIN

It was certainly noble of Min. Vergennes to invite us-

ADAMS

What you ascribe as noble, I think an act of desperation.

FRANKLIN

Then why have you bothered to come? Has 6 million livres bought your-

ADAMS

If anyone has been bought by France, Doctor, it is you. The French were only concerned over our renewed relations with England.

The carriage abruptly stops. In agony, the Doctor adjusts his position. Adams sighs.

ADAMS

Ben, forgive me-

FRANKLIN

Remember our agreement, John-allow me to do the talking.

Adams nods as the driver opens the cabin door. They assist the Doctor to his feet. Vergennes greets them.

VERGENNES

Gentlemen, good news. It appears the King has forgiven your reckless and rude behavior-but has your Congress?

The Doctor winces.

ADAMS

We need not explain our behavior to you, to your King, or to Congress.

EXT. ROAD TO PASSY - DAWN

Benny's coach approaches the gates of the Bastille, whisks by the Monastery of the White Tears, crosses the Pont de Neuilly, and enters the Champs Elysées—before climbing the slopes of Passy.

EXT./INT. PASSY HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Benny hops out of the cabin and into the foyer—nearly bumping into his grandfather.

FRANKLIN

Benny? What are you—I specifically instructed you to remain in Geneva.

BENNY

Grandpapa, do not be angry with me. M. De Marignac thought it best I return.  
(reaching into his pocket)  
He has sent along this overdue bill.

The Doctor, leaning on him, grabs it.

FRANKLIN

Well...since you are here—breakfast?

IN THE DINING ROOM

BENNY

Will Temple be joining us?

FRANKLIN

He seldom wakes before noon. Poor Richard says, "Early to bed...

BENNY

Early to rise...

BENNY AND FRANKLIN

Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

FRANKLIN

You have arrived at the hour of my finest victory. The British have capitulated. The war is ended.

Benny pours two glasses of wine—handing one to the Doctor. Temple observes from the doorway.

FRANKLIN

(sits)

Naturally, Mr. Adams and Mr. Jay are to be credited, but left to my own devices, Canada would have been ours.

BENNY

To the United States of America.

FRANKLIN  
To the Treaty of Paris.

TEMPLE  
To victory at Yorktown.

BENNY  
(leaping to him)  
Temple!

TEMPLE  
(coolly hugging him)  
Little-uh-big Kingbird.

BENNY  
Grandpapa has trumpeted the news.

TEMPLE  
About himself.

Benny pours him wine. They sit.

TEMPLE  
Your Mother has given birth-again.  
Your new sister has been christened  
Deborah in honor of Grandmamma.

FRANKLIN  
Did it occur to you that I wished  
to tell him?

TEMPLE  
It did.

FRANKLIN  
You have grown insufferable over  
the years.

TEMPLE  
(rising)  
After breakfast, I shall present  
you with letters and portraits from  
home... Later, we will visit Paris.

BENNY  
I should stay with Grandpapa.

TEMPLE  
As you wish...

Temple squirms out of the room.

FRANKLIN  
Remember, Temple, tomorrow we sit  
for the official Signers' Portrait.

FRANKLIN  
Watch him closely.

BENNY  
Spy on him?

The Doctor winks at Benny, who counters with a dubious grin.

INT. PASSY HOTEL - ROOM OVERLOOKING THE SEINE - DAY

Painter BENJAMIN WEST, 45, positions Dr. Franklin, Temple, John Adams, and John Jay around a couch. Hearing a knock, Benny opens the door. The haughty, pointy-nosed ROBESPIERRE, 25, appears.

ROBESPIERRE  
Avocat Robespierre—avec Une  
lettre du Dr. Franklin con-  
cernant le statut légal de  
son paratonnerre en France.

SUBTITLES  
Attorney Robespierre with  
a letter for Dr. Franklin  
regarding French legal status  
of his lightning rod.

BENNY  
Il se trouve mal en ce  
moment. Je le transmettrai.

SUBTITLES  
He is quite indisposed at the  
moment. I will pass it along.

Handing Benny the post, Robespierre notices West's painting.

ROBESPIERRE  
Merci. Dites moi. Pourquoi est  
ce que M. West ne peint plus?

SUBTITLES  
Thank you... Tell me, why is  
M. West not painting all the  
signers?

BENNY  
Les Ministres britanniques ont  
refuse de s'asseoir—trop gênés.

SUBTITLES  
The British Ministers refused  
to sit—too humiliated.

A smiling Robespierre departs. Benny recasts his eyes upon the posturing Americans. The scene dissolves into a still portrait.

EXT. PASSY HOTEL - CLOUDY FALL DAY

Temple whips his horse as he and Benny take-off in a Cabriolet.

BENNY  
Do you visit Paris often?

TEMPLE  
To escape prison.  
(strikes the horse again)  
The old man is my jailor.

BENNY  
B. Free Franklin?

TEMPLE  
Freedom for all but his loved ones.

After a third thrashing, the horse speeds up.

EXT. PARIS CENTRE - LATER

TWO SENSUOUS MESDEMOISELLES spot Benny and Temple parking their buggy.

MADEMOISELLE #1  
Monsieur Franklin...a coincidence.

MADEMOISELLE #2  
Who is your handsome companion?

TEMPLE  
My cousin, Benny.

Benny nods. It starts to drizzle.

MADEMOISELLE #1  
We are on our way to the outdoor theatre. And you?

TEMPLE  
To the café.

MADEMOISELLE #2  
What a pity. Why not join us?

Temple looks up at the spitting sky and waves good-bye. As the drizzle becomes a downpour, the cousins duck under an awning.

TEMPLE  
How I envied you in Geneva.

BENNY  
I envied you—living in Passy.

TEMPLE  
What did you study?

BENNY  
Philosophy, Law, Art—

Young Parisian women join them.

TEMPLE  
I studied the females of Paris. They taught me "the art of love."

BENNY  
Did Grandpapa approve?

TEMPLE  
Approve? He invented "the art."

The rain stops. Temple and Benny spot the Mesdemoiselles.

TEMPLE  
Twice in one day—it must be fate.

MADEMOISELLE #1  
The performance has been cancelled.

Along the street, the foursome pair-off.

MADEMOISELLE #2  
Monsieur, are you visiting Paris?

BENNY  
I live at L' Hôtel de Valentinois.

MADEMOISELLE #2  
With Dr. Franklin?

BENNY  
Do you know my Grandpapa?

MADEMOISELLE #2  
Everyone knows your Grandpapa—  
especially the ladies.

Benny looks over his shoulder. Temple and Mademoiselle #1 have vanished. Mademoiselle #2 lures Benny down an alley. While they kiss, she undoes his shirt.

BENNY  
You have your reputation—

She puts her finger to his lips and resumes her seduction.

BENNY  
Temple arranged this.

MADEMOISELLE #2  
In your honor.

BENNY  
How revolting.

MADEMOISELLE #2  
(slapping his face)  
You find me revolting?

BENNY  
Not you. This—

She slaps him again.

BENNY  
Did he pay you?

MADEMOISELLE #2  
(slapping him a third time)  
Temple suggested you were lonely,  
that is all... We thought—

BENNY

I do not wish to hear what either  
of you thought.

MADAMOISELLE #2

Oui, Monsieur. Good night.

She ditches Benny, who, after redoing his shirt, walks home alone.

INT. PASSY HOTEL - DINING ROOM - NEXT DAY

Benny—joining Dr. Franklin and Madame Helvétius—pours himself juice.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS

I am thrilled by the company of  
the Franklin men.

BENNY

We seem to be missing one.

FRANKLIN

He has not returned. How did you—

Downing his drink, Benny signals his grandfather to drop the matter.

FRANKLIN

If the two of you are agreeable, we  
shall visit the park and pay  
tribute to the balloonists.

BENNY

A fantastic idea!

MADAME HELVÉTIUS

Wonderful!

EXT. PARIS - CHAMP-DE-MARS - LATER

Parisians acknowledge Dr. Franklin (leaning on his cane) and Madame Helvétius (walking her lap dog) as they stroll arm-in-arm. Benny leads them to the balloon platform.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS

Ben, you always speak of usefulness.  
What is the use of this invention?

FRANKLIN

What is the use of a newborn child?  
Necessity is the mother of invention  
and the balloon is, by far, the  
greatest invention to date... As a  
weapon of war, it would impose peace.  
What nation could defend itself  
against five thousand balloons,  
well-armed and provisioned?

BENNY  
Brilliant, Grandpapa.

A throng gathers around the balloon and its navigator. As it takes off, the dog barks incessantly.

FRANKLIN  
Imagine the next few centuries. The enlightened might someday transform balloon flight into space flight and land on the moon!

BENNY  
Is this not the greatest age? One day soon, we shall all be flying.

FRANKLIN  
(to Madame)  
If only God, in His wisdom, had provided mankind with wings—

MADAME HELVÉTIUS  
Then men and women would truly be free.

Off in a distance, the balloon falls from the sky.

EXT. VILLAGE OF GONESSE - CONTINUOUS

Fearful and hysterical villagers destroy the partially inflated balloon with pitchforks.

INT. PASSY HOTEL - DINING ROOM - NEXT DAY

The Franklins eat a light lunch.

FRANKLIN  
Boys, if we are to go swimming in the Seine, we must end this chitchat.

BENNY  
(to Temple)  
You should have seen the spectacular balloon flight yesterday.

Rolling his eyes, Temple bites into an apple.

TEMPLE  
Sorry I missed it.

FRANKLIN  
(slamming down his tea cup)  
Enough. Why must you bring Benny's spirit down with your own?

TEMPLE  
Benny, Benny, Benny—you seem to have forgotten you have two grandsons.

FRANKLIN  
Nonsense. I have done everything  
in my power to assist you.

Rising, Temple throws his apple into the hearth.

TEMPLE  
Your power? You serve as Minister  
to France at the King's insistence—  
an ironic twist of fate.

Benny clears his throat. Temple looks at him, then sits.

TEMPLE  
It is time you learnt that the  
legacy of the great Dr. Franklin  
will be a heavy burden to bear in  
life. I have slaved all these years  
as his secretary—and to what purpose.

FRANKLIN  
I do not believe in a deserved  
inheritance—only in hard work.  
Benny begins daily training to  
become a printer. And you?

TEMPLE  
Has it ever occurred to you that  
he may not wish to be a printer?

FRANKLIN  
Benny, is this true?

He shakes his head "no" and lowers it. The Doctor turns to Temple.

FRANKLIN  
What have you to say for yourself?

TEMPLE  
At your direction, I betrayed my  
father—and left the only mother I  
have ever known to die alone.

FRANKLIN  
Your father chose King George over  
his wife and son. He, not you,  
abandoned your stepmother... If  
you had stayed with him in America,  
you would have suffered his fate.

EXT. PASSY RIVERFRONT - MINUTES LATER

The Franklins wade naked in the waist-high waters of the Seine.  
Temple stares silently ahead.

BENNY  
Tell us, Temple.

TEMPLE  
Madame Brillon has refused me her  
daughter's hand in marriage.

FRANKLIN  
It must be on my account.

Temple rolls his eyes. The Doctor eases his way into deeper waters.

FRANKLIN  
I will speak to Madame.

TEMPLE  
Before you do, you must know that  
I am to be a father.

FRANKLIN  
(turning around)  
Mademoiselle Brillon is with child?

TEMPLE  
No, Madame Chaumont.

Startled, Benny dives into the water opposite them.

FRANKLIN  
Madame Chaumont? How can you be  
certain it is not her husband's?

TEMPLE  
They have not had relations in over  
a year.

FRANKLIN  
Married or unmarried—it matters not  
to you.

TEMPLE  
Madame will raise the child.

FRANKLIN  
It is just as well—I cannot fathom  
your fatherhood.

The Doctor swims ashore. Temple strokes his way to Benny.

TEMPLE  
I apologize for my outburst...

BENNY  
He only desires what is best for us.

TEMPLE  
And what do you desire?

BENNY  
To be a lawyer.

TEMPLE  
 (dunking Benny)  
 I knew it. You must tell him.

MONTAGE - BENNY ADJUSTS TO LIFE AT PASSY

- A) Benny and Temple fence in the breezy autumn air.
- B) On a snowy day, a printer trains Benny to run a rolling press.
- C) Benny awakens, greets his caged kingbird, and places it on his finger. Suddenly, it flies around the room, out the window, and into the Spring garden below.

EXT. PASSY HOTEL - GARDEN - DAY (JULY 4, 1785)

Hotel staff arrange chairs. Nearby, Benny observes Temple killing a mouse with a bottle of "fixed-air" then bringing it back to life.

BENNY  
 You are a finer conjuror than Mesmer.

Leaning heavily on his cane, Dr. Franklin sits near his grandsons.

FRANKLIN  
 Boys, come hither and take a seat...  
 This 4th of July we put M. Mesmer to  
 the test-just as we did the British  
 nine years ago.

BENNY  
 We would not miss it.

TEMPLE  
 Or the lovely ladies.

Guests begin taking their places.

FRANKLIN  
 The dreaded news has finally arrived.  
 I have been recalled. We must leave  
 our beloved France for America.

TEMPLE  
 Home to Philadelphia? What is to  
 become of us?

FRANKLIN  
 Reacquaint ourselves with our city,  
 our family, and our friends.

BENNY  
 But I have no friends there--

FRANKLIN  
 You will make friends, finish your  
 education, become a printer.

TEMPLE

(stands)

It all ends, just like that?

FRANKLIN

Our mission is far from over. We must maintain the Revolution from the American side of the Atlantic. Tomorrow, we begin packing—Temple, you have loose ends to tie up.

A trumpet blast prompts the Doctor to begin the proceedings. Benny and Temple join Madame Brillon, Vergennes, and Academy Scientists.

FRANKLIN

Si votre majesté et l'Academie veulent bien, M. Mesmer Mesmer devirions commencer.

SUBTITLES

If it pleases her Majesty and the Academy, M. Mesmer shall begin.

Queen Marie, seated prominently, nods. Spectators whisper as the white-haired, black-caped M. MESMER, 52, enters the staging area. A blindfolded M. DELSON, 38, follows.

MESMER

Je presente M. Delson, que j'ai gueri de paralysie en Trios mois, au moyen du magnétisme animal. Je oindre mainenant quatre abres.

SUBTITLES

I present M. Delson, whom I have cured of paralysis, in three months, by way of animal magnetism. I will now anoint four trees.

Mesmer waves a magnetic wand against four nearby trees. He then removes Delson's blindfold.

MESMER

Trouvez les arbres oints.

SUBTITLES

Find the anointed trees.

Delson grabs three anointed trees for a few seconds at a time.

MESMER

Avez-vous senti queqlue chose, M. Delson?

SUBTITLES

Did you feel anything, M. Delson?

DELSON

J'ai senti un choc qui a augmenté d'arbre en arbre.

SUBTITLES

I felt a shock which increased from tree to tree.

After stumbling around, Delson clings to a fourth tree.

MESMER

Que ressentez vous?

SUBTITLES

What are you feeling now?

Delson collapses in a seizure. Hesitating, the Doctor stands.

FRANKLIN

Votre Majesté, Mesdames et Messieurs, vous avez été témoins d'un acte frauduleux.

SUBTITLES

Your Highness, ladies and gentlemen, you have witnessed a fraudulent act.

FRANKLIN

Le quatrième et dernier arbre  
duquel Delson est tombé n'était  
pas parmi les arbres oints.  
L'électricité que M. Mesmer  
dit avoir mis en mouvement n'a  
pas des qualités magnétiques.

SUBTITLES

The fourth and final tree from  
which M. Delson fell was not  
one of the anointed trees. The  
electricity M. Mesmer claims to  
have set in motion is void of  
any magnetic qualities.

Stunned audience members murmur. Temple, Benny, Madame Brillon, and Vergennes encircle the Doctor. Jefferson approaches from behind.

TEMPLE

What will be left of Jeremiah, if  
this is how you treat Mesmer?

FRANKLIN

Infidels like M. Mesmer could  
weaken Christian faith in the  
miracles of the New Testament.

JEFFERSON

A combination of folly and fraud.

FRANKLIN

Tom, Mr. Ambassador, congratulations  
on your appointment. Do not permit M.  
Vergennes to take advantage of you.

VERGENNES

The way you have taken advantage  
of France, Dr. Franklin?

MADAME BRILLON

(kissing the Doctor's cheek)

Mon Cher Papa... I have missed you.

From out of nowhere, Madame Helvétius interjects herself between them—extending her arm to Franklin. He politely kisses it.

MADAME BRILLON

My charming and redoubtable rival.

The Mesdames kiss cheek to cheek. Madame Brillon pulls the Doctor aside.

MADAME BRILLON

Is it true, Papa? Are you leaving?

Franklin lingers in silence as a weeping Madame recoils. He reaches out to her.

MADAME BRILLON

How could you lie to me? I refuse  
to say goodbye.

Madame Brillon vanishes. Madame Helvétius reappears and slips her hand under the Doctor's arm. They rejoin the others.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS

Ben, I have not recently had the pleasure of your company.

FRANKLIN

Forgive me, Madame, I am waiting 'til the nights are longer.

Benny points to Temple, who flirts with two females.

BENNY

Grandpapa, Temple and I are off...

JEFFERSON

Ah, to be young again.

The trumpet blows. Queen Marie descends upon the stage.

QUEEN MARIE

Membres de l'Acadãmie, sujets loyaux, permetez-moi de render homage à un des plus grand home d'ãtat aumonde le-Dr. Franklin.

SUBTITLES

Academy members, loyal subjects, on this, the 9th Anniversary of of American Independence, allow me to pay homage to the world's greatest statesmen-Dr. Franklin.

The audience applauds as Vergennes escorts the Doctor forward.

QUEEN MARIE

S'il n'est pas occupã ã server server son pays il se charge du notre avec competence en nous protageant des crapules comme M. Mesmer. Dr. Franklin, ã l'ocassion de votre derni en representation public, leRoi et moi-mãme sou haitons vous faire faire partnotre immense estime.

SUBTITLES

If he is not busy serving his country, he is ably serving ours-protecting us from scoundrels like M. Mesmer. Dr. Franklin, on the occasion of your final public appearance in France, the King and I wish to present you with a token of our immense esteem.

The Queen unveils a miniature of King Louis XVI, encrusted with 400 diamonds. The audience sounds its approval.

MONTAGE - BENNY AND TEMPLE IN PARIS

A) The cousins and their dates attend The Barber of Seville.

B) They entertain friends at an outdoor cafã.

C) At night, they visit Vaux Hall to watch the Royal Dance Troop.

EXT. PARIS - SAINT GERMAIN FAIR - NIGHT

Temple and Benny observe a plain looking redhead, ABBY ADAMS, 18.

TEMPLE

Can you spot the American ladies? Notice, then, the big feet and unrefined manners of Abby Adams.

MISS ADAMS  
 Good evening, gentlemen...  
 Perhaps, I should have used the  
 singular form.

Temple scoffs at her. Benny nods.

BENNY  
 Good evening, Miss Adams.

MISS ADAMS  
 Call me Abby... You must be Benny,  
 the good grandson.

TEMPLE  
 (pulling him away)  
 Save yourself while you can.

INT. PASSY HOTEL - DRAWING ROOM - DAY (AUGUST, 1786)

On the sofa, Madame Helvétius caresses Dr. Franklin's face.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS  
 Your proposal flatters me, but I  
 shant soil the memory of my husband.

FRANKLIN  
 Madame, in a dream I had, your  
 deceased husband informed me he had  
 happily taken a new wife in heaven,  
 my Deborah, who told me flatly, "I  
 have been a good wife to you for a  
 half century—be content with that."

MADAME HELVÉTIUS  
 You are still dreaming...

FRANKLIN  
 Only of you.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS  
 Then why must you return to America?

Benny and Temple enter and pack the remaining boxes.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS  
 How was your final evening in Paris?

BENNY  
 We mingled with everyone—including  
 John Quincy's sister, Abby.

FRANKLIN  
 She would make a fine catch.

TEMPLE  
 Gabby Abby? You cannot be serious.

MADAME HELVÉTIUS

Poor Richard advises "Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterward."

Vergennes, Jefferson, and Madame Chaumont (holding a sleepy TODDLER) appear. Temple removes the boy from Madame's care. Franklin, with the aid of his cane and Benny, rises. Vergennes hugs him.

VERGENNES

Permit me a simple observation. You are, by far, the finest diplomat the world has ever known.

JEFFERSON

(shaking Franklin's hand)

I am your successor, only. You could never be replaced.

MADAME CHAUMONT

(kissing Franklin's cheek)

We will be lost without you.

Moved to tears, the Doctor attempts to speak. Instead, he embraces his colleagues and hugs Madame Helvétius as she joins him.

FRANKLIN

My emotions have swallowed my words.  
It is time.

EXT. WALKWAY OF PASSY - LATER

A barge, hauling 128 boxes, floats down the Seine. Hotel staff and well-wishers drop petals of flowers along Dr. Franklin's path. Amid the sobbing, they kiss their ailing patriarch and his grandsons goodbye.

EXT. LONDON HARBOR - DUSK

A frigate, carrying the Franklins, docks. An anxious and graying William, now 56, stands by a British flagpole. Temple rushes to him. Benny, watching his grandfather, lags behind. The Doctor glimpses the gathering from on deck. He looks to the heavens.

FLASHBACK - PHILADELPHIA FARM - RAINY DAY - THIRTY YEARS AGO

As an electrical storm rages, William fearlessly flies a kite across the pasture. Dr. Franklin records the event from a shed.

Then it happens. Lightning strikes the kite. William remains unharmed. Father and son dash into each other's arms.

BACK TO PRESENT

The Doctor watches his progeny from the seclusion of the ship.

EXT. SHORES OF THE DELAWARE - DAY

(SEPTEMBER 14, 1786)

Americans swamp the returning Franklins. Richard, Sarah, and Willy (hiding a kite) lead the way.

RICHARD  
Papa, Temple, Benny!

As the crowd fêtes Dr. Franklin and Temple, Benny embraces his middle-aged parents. Willy, now 15, and taller than Benny, presents him with "Kingbird."

SARAH  
Thank God you have returned safely.

BENNY  
Willy? You were a boy when I left.

SARAH  
And so were you... Come meet your brothers and sisters.

Sarah introduces Benny to his younger siblings—ELIZABETH, 10; LOUIS, 7; RICHARD, JR., 5; and DEBBIE, 4. He kisses their cheeks.

SARAH  
Elizabeth, Louis, Richard, Jr., and Debbie—your eldest brother, Benny—our very own Anglo-Frenchman.

Fife and drum lead the Franklins and Baches home.

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT - LATER

Sarah, Willy, Jesse, and a crowd gather. Dr. Franklin and various dignitaries assemble on a makeshift stage. Temple and Benny, standing in the back, scope out the crowd. From the podium, Richard introduces Congressman Lee.

RICHARD  
The Hon. Richard Henry Lee.

LEE  
Dr. Franklin, in behalf of the United States Congress, I salute you.

FRANKLIN  
Mr. Lee, my regards to Congress... Humbly, I thank you and the Lord for this triumphant welcome.

They embrace. The crowd applauds. Robert Morris and the Assembly of Pennsylvania parade across stage. Morris stops at the dais.

RICHARD (OS)  
The Assembly of Pennsylvania, led by the Hon. Robert Morris.

MORRIS

Our deepest gratitude for the peace  
you have negotiated. May future  
generations sing of your glory.

Temple, spotting the ravishing Margaret Markoe (now 17), slips away  
from Benny.

FRANKLIN (OS)

My glory is due to you. I am  
content to have served the people  
of this great state and nation...

As Morris and Lee exit, the ruddy-cheeked DR. GEORGE LOGAN, 45,  
positions himself at center stage. Benny notices Temple flirting  
with Margaret.

RICHARD (OS)

Dr. Logan, President of the American  
Philosophical Society and Officer  
of the Library Company.

LOGAN

We welcome Dr. Franklin on this  
momentous occasion and praise him for  
founding our venerable institutions.

Temple whispers into Margaret's ear. She brushes him aside.

FRANKLIN (OS)

I congratulate you, Doctor, on your  
laudable endeavors for the promotion  
of useful knowledge among us.

DR. DAVID RITTENHOUSE, 42, escorts professors in cap and gown.

RICHARD

The distinguished Professors of the  
University of Pennsylvania, led by  
Provost David Rittenhouse.

RITTENHOUSE

We exalt Dr. Franklin for founding  
our University; for extolling and  
refining the genius of America.

FRANKLIN

You, who honor me, honor America  
thru your instruction of the young.  
Though it seldom meets with its just  
rewards, its joy is the knowledge  
that you have trained virtuous men.

Cheers ring out. The long-faced DR. BENJAMIN RUSH, 33, appears.  
Benny approaches Temple and Margaret.

RICHARD (OS)  
I present Dr. Benjamin Rush.

RUSH  
As founder of Pennsylvania Hospital,  
America's first, Dr. Franklin has  
immeasurably advanced the field of  
medicine.

FRANKLIN  
Your care of the sick and dying,  
Dr. Rush, humbles us all.

RICHARD  
On this occasion, it seems fitting to  
announce Dr. Franklin's election to  
City Council and the State Assembly.

CROWD  
Huzzah! Long live Dr. Franklin!

Fife and drum play. Temple, again, whispers into Margaret's ear.

MARGARET  
Your grandfather impresses me. I wish  
I could say the same for his grandson.

BENNY  
To which grandson are you referring?

TEMPLE  
My cousin, Benjamin Franklin Bache.

Dr. Markoe beckons.

MARKOE  
Margaret... Margaret, over here.

BENNY  
Little Margaret, Dr. Markoe's  
daughter?

Parting company, she keeps Benny in sight. Dazed, he seeks her out.

TEMPLE  
Let her go.

BENNY  
Should I not pursue her?

TEMPLE  
I am familiar with the art of  
seduction—not of pursuit.

BENNY  
And you have a bastard son as  
a token of your artistry.

TEMPLE  
 (grabbing him)  
 Self-righteousness really becomes  
 you—as it does the old man.  
 (letting him go)  
 Your innocent-looking face cannot  
 hide the lust in your heart.

BENNY  
 I am not like you.

TEMPLE  
 But your tongue cuts like mine, and  
 deep down, you are just a Franklin.

MONTAGE - BENNY, TEMPLE, AND MARGARET ABOUT TOWN

- A) Benny, Temple, Margaret, and friends gather at a fall picnic.
- B) The threesome skate on a crowded frozen pond.
- C) Alone, Benny and Margaret kiss under a blooming tree.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA - CLASSROOM - DAY (SEPT. 17, 1787)

As the PROFESSOR ends his lecture, Benny finishes a notebook sketch  
 of Margaret.

PROFESSOR  
 Do not forget tomorrow's assignment.  
 (handing Benny a report)  
 Your legal arguments were superb.

Smiling, Benny grabs his books and dashes off.

EXT./INT. STATE HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Benny peers into an open window. Dr. Franklin addresses delegates.

FRANKLIN  
 Thus, Sir, I consent to this  
 Constitution because I expect none  
 better, and because I am not sure  
 that it is not the best.

Benny directs four servants to ready a sedan chair, then returns  
 to the window.

FRANKLIN  
 I have often looked at the sun on  
 the chair behind the President's  
 desk to see whether it was rising  
 or setting. At length, I have the  
 happiness to know that it is a  
 rising and not a setting sun.

The scene dissolves into the "Portrait of the Signers."

EXT. STATE HOUSE ENTRANCE/HIGH STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Benny holds the door. Dr. Franklin, supported by Washington and the diminutive JAMES MADISON, 37, emerges. A WOMAN steps forward.

WOMAN

Dr. Franklin, what have you wrought?

FRANKLIN

A Republic, Madame, if you can keep it...

(shifting his weight)

Mr. Madison, my namesake, Benny.

WASHINGTON

A most loyal grandson.

BENNY

(bowing his head)

To the Constitution, Sirs.

After shaking his colleagues' hands, the Doctor, along with Benny, climbs into the sedan chair.

FRANKLIN

It will be necessary for you and future generations to nourish and sustain this promise of permanency.

Benny kisses his grandfather's brow.

FRANKLIN

I think a unicameral legislature less cumbersome—but I suppose an upper and lower house will do.

BENNY

If not for the Connecticut compromise, you would still be in that hall.

FRANKLIN

If Congress had accepted my proposal to begin each session with a prayer, we would have finished weeks ago.

The chair's movement jolts the passengers.

FRANKLIN

The founding of our Republic has been so replete with miracles—the older I grow—the more inclined I am to believe that God, indeed, governs in the affairs of men.

The chair meanders through the street like a float in a parade.

EXT. FAIRMOUNT PARK - SPRING DAY

While musicians play, Benny, Margaret, and young society types dance around a picnic spread. As the tune fades, they laugh and giggle their way onto blankets. Margaret lays her head on Benny's chest.

BENNY  
Please sing "Caro Mio."

MARGARET  
(propping her head up)  
Not in front of—I wish you would  
not embarrass me so.

BENNY  
For me?

After coaxing from friends, she serenades Benny.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA - CLASSROOM - WINTER DAY

Benny stands in front of an empty, makeshift jury box.

BENNY  
In 1735, a New York editor, John  
Peter Zenger was prosecuted for  
seditious libel. The attorney  
conceded to his client's guilt but  
argued "truth" as a defense.

Margaret, covered in snowflakes, stands in the doorway.

BENNY  
By returning a "not guilty" verdict,  
the jury nullified British libel  
law precisely because it had  
ignored the element of "truth."  
An American legal precedent was  
established. In New York, the  
people and the press now possess the  
right to criticize their government.  
Gentlemen of the jury, you must  
uphold this right in Pennsylvania by  
finding in favor of the defendant.  
(noticing Margaret)  
You are obliged to grant him the  
liberty of expressing his political  
sentiments in the public square or  
risk losing that liberty yourselves.

Applauding, she moves towards him.

MARGARET  
You will make a fine lawyer.

BENNY  
How long have you been standing—

MARGARET

Long enough. Your Grandpapa must be so proud of you.

As she hugs him, he does not respond.

MARGARET

He knows of your intentions?

BENNY

My Grandpapa is determined that I be a printer like him. He despises lawyers—including his own son.

MARGARET

Benny, you must follow your heart.

BENNY

And risk losing him?

MARGARET

Would you rather lose me?

He passionately kisses her.

EXT./INT. FRANKLIN COURT - SUMMER DAY

Carrying a satchel of books, Benny surfaces from the archway—passing a new brick building. Louis and Richard, Jr., play noisily in the garden. Benny points to the opened second floor windows of the house.

BENNY

Shut up, you scapegraces!  
Grandpapa is working.

FRANKLIN

(shouting out the window)  
Do not mind them. Come join me.

Both brothers stick out their tongues at Benny.

INSIDE FRANKLIN'S LIBRARY

Two lengthy windows face north and two face south. Bookshelves span the walls. Designs, sketches, and unusual artifacts line a table. As Jesse reads aloud from Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels," the Doctor reaches for his staff with an artificial hand.

He then eases his way into a rocking chair with a hovering fan and removes a marionette resting on the chair's arm—setting it between a glass machine (depicting human blood circulation) and a printing press.

FRANKLIN

I thoroughly enjoyed your reading,  
Jesse. You have come a long way.

JESSE

Due to you and Mrs. Bache.

FRANKLIN

Nonsense. The credit belongs to you.  
You have more than earned your freedom.

JESSE

(leaving)

I have never felt more free.

Rising, the Doctor strokes a two-headed snake with one hand and flips through an enormous book with the other. He appears as a wizard. Benny stands in the doorway.

FRANKLIN

Come in, Benny.

Benny slowly releases his bag.

FRANKLIN

Have I told you the story of the  
Quaker Abolitionist, Benjamin Lay?

BENNY

Yes, Grandpapa, many times.

FRANKLIN

Now you have the honor of telling me.

BENNY

Benjamin Lay sought to purify  
himself and indoctrinate the  
people—did you not print an  
anti-slavery pamphlet for him?

The Doctor nods impatiently.

FLASHBACK - HIGH STREET - DAY

BENNY (VO)

One fine summer day, Benjamin Lay  
stood on a corner giving away his  
worldly possessions. He then began  
to undress. As he left half-naked,  
the crowd roared with laughter.

BACK TO PRESENT

FRANKLIN

He was my dear friend. Misunderstood,  
but correct nevertheless... Luxury  
is the curse of nations.

BENNY

A man ought not become a slave of  
the things he possesses.

FRANKLIN  
Indeed... Benny, I have become  
President of the Abolition Society.

BENNY  
I am happy for you.

FRANKLIN  
But not happy for yourself.

BENNY  
I am an outsider in my own country.  
Mama calls me her Anglo-Frenchman.  
Even Margot toys with me.

He slowly approaches the snake—attempting to pet it. The snake  
lunges forward. Benny flinches.

BENNY  
Have you heard the story of the  
ridiculous duel between Mr. House  
and Mr. Fischer which stirred all  
of Philadelphia when we were away?

Dr. Franklin motions no.

BENNY  
What a silly business it was. House  
had insulted Fischer. Fischer could  
have simply returned the insult...  
Instead, he challenged House to a  
duel and was killed. Insane?

FRANKLIN  
All violence and all war is insane.

Benny mimics his grandfather.

FRANKLIN (OS)  
There has never been a good war  
nor a bad peace.

BENNY  
Will you ever stop lecturing me?  
(grabbing the marionette)  
Temple always said you were a  
puppet master.

FRANKLIN  
Be careful. Do not deceive yourself  
the way Temple has.

BENNY  
He enjoys life.

FRANKLIN  
Look at me.

Benny puts the marionette down.

FRANKLIN

Temple lives for wine and women—  
he fancies himself a gentleman.

BENNY

Are you not being unfair?

FRANKLIN

He is a lazy, flirtatious scoundrel  
with a bastard son.

BENNY

Like his father—and father's father.

FRANKLIN

I was the 15<sup>th</sup> born of 17 children—  
forced to live as an indentured  
servant to my brother, James. Hard  
work was my life. Your Grandmamma—

BENNY

As I recall it, you deserted her—  
just as you deserted me.

Pounding his fist on the table, the Doctor distances himself from  
the now agitated snake and stands facing Benny.

FRANKLIN

No! I begged her to travel with me  
to England, but fear would not let  
her venture out on the high seas...  
As for you, I sought to provide  
the best education abroad.

BENNY

You plucked me from my family and  
country—then sent me away.

FRANKLIN

I did my best by you. You are  
proof enough of that.

BENNY

You left me alone in Geneva while  
you played the field in France.

FRANKLIN

Flirted—yes—in Paris as in London. It  
was my diplomatic duty to win friends.  
(removing his bifocals)  
But I never betrayed my affection  
for Deb—your Grandmamma. Your Uncle  
William predated our marriage.

Benny turns away.

FRANKLIN

Regarding Temple, I gave him an estate on which to prosper. He converted it into a farm and hired a farmer. While the farmer plowed the fields, Temple plowed the ladies.

BENNY

(turning back)

All work—no play—makes a man dull.

FRANKLIN

The farmer, thus abandoned, ruined the farm. Now, Temple must sell it to avoid debtors prison.

BENNY

No gains without pains.

FRANKLIN

(sits)

The miserable boy forgets that every gentleman must pay for the privilege of being one... Let Temple's fate be a lesson to you.

BENNY

I am quite ready to work as hard as you say, but allow me to amuse myself for a few hours a day—I work better when I have had a good time.

FRANKLIN

I once thought as you, until I realized that idle pleasures are not real joys—they are deceptions.

BENNY

(reaching for his satchel)

Dance, cards, and theatre suit me.

FRANKLIN

Nothing brings more pain than too much pleasure; more bondage than too much liberty. Look at the impious and libertine—they forget the presence of God and sink into unhappiness.

Almost out the door, Benny returns and slams it shut.

BENNY

I am not impious or libertine—but I know my own nature and I know I need pleasure... My only object on earth is that virtue about which you so often speak—happiness.

FRANKLIN

Do good to others and be virtuous,  
then you will be happy in this life-  
and the next. Take my hand...

EXT./INT. FRANKLIN COURT - NEW BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Benny watches as Dr. Franklin unlocks the door. Inside, the tables and walls are covered with sheets. The Doctor unveils a print shop.

FRANKLIN

All of this, my Kingbird, is for  
you—it is where you belong.

Benny inspects the fonts, press, and bookbindery. Finding a large Bible, he opens it and reads, "To Benny—From your loving Grandpapa."

FRANKLIN

Being a printer led to my success in  
life. It afforded me a measure of inde-

BENNY

Grandpapa, I have always tried to please  
you—even at the expense of the truth.

(kissing the Doctor's brow)

I plan to be a lawyer.

FRANKLIN

Since when? I brought you up in the  
honest and useful trade of printing so  
that you might prosper and carry on my  
legacy... Are you exacting some sort  
of revenge?

Benny stares ahead as his grandfather exits.

FRANKLIN

Poor Richard says, "It is the trade  
of lawyers to question everything,  
confuse everyone, and yield nothing."

BENNY

I am not seeking his approval.

EXT./INT. DR. KUHN'S HOUSE - DAY

Benny and Margaret stand at the door.

MARGARET

Do come in and sit with me.

BENNY

I must be on my way—

MARGARET

(opening the door)

If you must go...

IN THE FOYER

As he kisses her neck, she whispers in his ear.

MARGARET

We should be more careful.

(loudly)

Is anyone home?

In the stillness, he gropes her—knocking a letter off a nightstand. Picking it up, he sniffs its perfume and reads the cover before handing it over.

BENNY

"From: Mr. John Noble, St. Croix.

To: Miss Margaret Markoe"

MARGARET

May I please have it?

IN THE PARLOR

They sit on a sofa. He kisses her lips.

BENNY

I love you, Margot.

She gently pushes him back.

MARGARET

I have something to tell you. I sail for St. Croix in the fall.

BENNY

What? For how long?

MARGARET

Six months—but the summer is ours.

BENNY

I would rather you not go.

MARGARET

(caressing his face)

Benny, my sweet Benny, I must.

BENNY

Have you a lover waiting for you?

MARGARET

(serious—then grinning)

Several. My grandfather, uncles, cousins...

Leaving, he forces a smile.

EXT. CHESTNUT STREET WHARF - DUSK

Margaret walks alone. Temple sneaks up behind her.

TEMPLE (OS)  
No escort this evening?

MARGARET  
(turning around)  
Temple? You startled me.

TEMPLE  
I rarely see you without Benny.

MARGARET  
He is not with you?

Temple playfully looks over his shoulders.

TEMPLE  
Feeling smothered by him?

MARGARET  
Yes. No. Oh—I do not know—

He makes a pass. She acquiesces before pushing him away.

MARGARET  
Not a word of this—

Temple, hearing a drowning man's cry, removes his shirt and dives into the river. Margaret looks flushed and confused.

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT - MULBERRY TREE - SUMMER DAY

Sitting, Dr. Franklin and Jane (fanning herself) sip iced tea. Sarah sews. Richard, smoking his pipe, reads a paper. Benny struts about as his smaller siblings play in the grass. Jesse refills drinks.

BENNY  
Before Margot leaves, I will ask her to marry me.

RICHARD  
But will she oblige you?

BENNY  
Mama, what is your opinion?

SARAH  
How often must I tell you? I—we approve—she's a lovely girl... Richard, remember our courtship?

RICHARD  
Yes dear. Your mother was very supportive... Your father, however—

FRANKLIN

Let bygones be bygones.

JANE

Ben, you were terrible about it.

FRANKLIN

William's letters convinced me that Richard was only after my money.

RICHARD

I still am.

The adults, except the Doctor, chuckle.

JANE

You should have been home to judge for yourself. The letters of suspicion he sent to me in Boston...

SARAH

Aunt Jane, your company is so splendid.

JESSE

(pouring Jane tea)

It certainly is.

FRANKLIN

Poor Richard says, "Visitors and fish smell in three days."

RICHARD

(stands)

According to the Pennsylvania Gazette, the Capitol is moving to Philadelphia.

SARAH

Do not interrupt us with old news. Papa, you must apologize to your sister—and forgive your son.

JANE

He need not apologize to me—but to William? Mama always said, "To err is human, to forgive—Divine."

FRANKLIN

Papa always said, "Pardoning the bad injures the good."

Richard plops down. Just arrived, Temple drops luggage on his uncle's lap and hugs his aunts. Handing Sarah the pitcher, Jesse removes Temple's bags.

TEMPLE

Hello, everyone—Grandpapa.

JANE  
 (softly to her brother)  
 Your gripe is with his father,  
 not with him.

FRANKLIN  
 They are one and the same.

TEMPLE  
 I suppose I deserve it, Aunt Jane.

SARAH  
 (handing Temple a drink)  
 How was New York?

The Doctor grabs his cane, then dotes on his younger grandchildren.

FRANKLIN  
 I beg you, Temple. Mend your ways.

BENNY  
 (throwing Temple a peach)  
 Have you heard? I intend to ask  
 Margot to marry me.

Franklin glares at Temple. Margaret appears unannounced.

TEMPLE  
 Attention everyone. A toast—to  
 Kingbird and Margot...

EXT. PHILADELPHIA WATERFRONT - AUTUMN DAY

Ships enter and leave the harbor. Benny and Margaret are alone in  
 a crowd.

BENNY  
 Do not board—stay and marry me.

MARGARET  
 How would you support a family?

BENNY  
 (gazing into her eyes)  
 My Grandpapa is not long for this  
 world. He would like nothing more  
 than to see his namesake happily  
 married. How could you deny him?

MARGARET  
 There are other women...

BENNY  
 Why would you say such a thing?

MARGARET  
 It seems you wish to be married.

BENNY  
 (gently kissing her)  
 Only to you.

MARGARET  
 Then you must wait upon my return.

BENNY  
 So you will marry me.

Captain Wickes yells, "All aboard" and waves to Benny. Margaret boards ship with the other passengers, occasionally turning back.

BENNY  
 I love you Margot... I shall write  
 you everyday.

EXT. CITY TAVERN - BACK PORCH - EVENING

Temple and Benny down pints of ale as they sit on opposite benches.

TEMPLE  
 Women are useful for one thing.  
 Now Margot is of no use at all.

BENNY  
 You have a most enlightened view of  
 the female sex... Margot will  
 marry me.

TEMPLE  
 Did she accept your proposal?

Leaning back, Benny loses his balance. Temple grabs him.

TEMPLE  
 Take hold of yourself... Has it  
 occurred to you that Margot might  
 have run-off to marry another man?

Benny stares ahead before blinking his eyes.

TEMPLE  
 You are fool. She has even  
 succumbed to my advances.

Leaning in, Benny decks Temple.

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT - NEXT DAY

Benny stands by the Mulberry tree. Sarah quietly approaches.

SARAH  
 How is my Anglo-Frenchman?

BENNY  
 Mama, please stop calling me that.

SARAH  
You once liked it... What is wrong?

BENNY  
I am hung-over, that is all.

SARAH  
(stroking his hair)  
It is something else. Margaret?  
Temple? Grandpapa. I am glad to hear  
you finally stood up to him. Hold  
your ground—I never could. I should  
never have let him take you from me.

Benny sits on a bench. His mother cozies up to him.

BENNY  
So why did you?

SARAH  
For your protection. As you very  
well know, we rightly thought you  
safer in France... Now what is  
really troubling you?

BENNY  
Temple claims to have made love to  
Margot.

SARAH  
(grinning)  
And you believe him?

BENNY  
Why would he say such a thing?

SARAH  
Though it is difficult to imagine,  
Temple was once scorned by a woman  
he loved. He does not want you  
suffering his fate. None of us do.  
He thinks Margaret has left for good.  
It is his way of protecting you.

BENNY  
I do not need his protection—I need  
the truth... What do you think?

SARAH  
'Tis easy to see, hard to foresee.  
(stands)  
I caution you, though. If Margaret  
does return to you, it is because  
she loves you. Do not risk that love  
by confronting her about Temple.

On his feet again, Benny pecks his mother's cheek.

INT. FRANKLIN COURT HOUSE - BEDROOM - WINTER DAY

Dr. Franklin's head tosses about a pillow.

FLASHBACK/DAYDREAM - BLUE ROOM - NIGHT - FORTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

Franklin, in tears, clings to his dying son—kissing his forehead.

FRANKLIN

Hold on Frankie, I will find a cure.

As the boy draws his last breath, the Doctor releases his body.

BACK TO PRESENT

The Doctor, glimpsing a large portrait of the crucified Christ hanging above the mantle, frantically climbs out of bed.

FRANKLIN

Sally. Sally!

Carrying fresh linens, Sarah bumps into him at the door.

SARAH

I am right here.

As she fluffs his pillows, he rests in a chair.

FRANKLIN

Make my bed so that I may die in a decent manner. As Poor Richard says, "A good life is long enough."

SARAH

Nonsense. You, Poor Richard, will recover and live to be a hundred.

She opens a snow-covered window—then closes it.

SARAH

Papa? Oh, never mind... You have spent your whole life dismissing me.  
(tucking him back into bed)  
Tom Jefferson is downstairs waiting to see you. If you have trouble breathing, change your position.

FRANKLIN

A dying man can do nothing easily.

SARAH

(leaving)  
And no more of that foolish talk.

FRANKLIN

My devoted Sally, you have given me more joy than two sons.

Gasping ecstatically, she dashes away. Reaching for a book, Franklin knocks his spectacles off a nightstand.

FRANKLIN  
Benny? Benny, come quickly!

BENNY  
Grandpapa. What is wrong?

Benny spots the specs and places them on his grandfather.

FRANKLIN  
An invention of mine.

BENNY  
(stroking his forehead)  
Are you feeling alright?

FRANKLIN  
Are you and Temple getting along?

BENNY  
He is up to his old tricks.

FRANKLIN  
Involving Margaret?

BENNY  
(pacing the room)  
Only in his mind.

FRANKLIN  
Do not take him seriously—no one else does... Has Margaret returned?

BENNY  
Not yet—it has been four months. I have written her everyday since. She has not written me once.

FRANKLIN  
You have proposed to her?

BENNY  
Remember, I blurted it out—and she scoffed. Though she has sounded the news to everyone.

FRANKLIN  
As have you.

BENNY  
I am in love. What else could I do?

FRANKLIN  
Be patient. Become a printer... One lawyer in this family is one too—

BENNY  
 Grandpapa, I am not Uncle William.  
 (sits on the bed)  
 To be truly happy, a man needs only  
 a profession, some money, and a  
 woman's heart.

The Doctor draws attention to the painting of Christ.

FRANKLIN  
 And Him...

Benny observes Jefferson standing at the door.

JEFFERSON  
 A portrait worth noticing.

FRANKLIN  
 Finally home from Paris.

Jefferson embraces his old compatriot.

FRANKLIN  
 Tell me about our friends—Mesdames  
 Helvétius and Brillon.

JEFFERSON  
 The news is not all good.

FRANKLIN  
 News rarely is... Benny, hand Mr.  
 Jefferson the scroll.

JEFFERSON  
 A chapter from your autobiography?

FRANKLIN  
 Take it from a dying man. The last  
 few pages include a map—it should  
 end our border dispute with Canada.

Jefferson skims the manuscript.

FRANKLIN (OS)  
 It is the original—marking the  
 boundaries agreed upon at the  
 Treaty of Paris.

JEFFERSON  
 We thought the map lost forever.

FRANKLIN  
 Benny found it among my papers.

JEFFERSON  
 Still serving your country.

The Doctor shifts his attention back to the painting.

FRANKLIN

And Him... If a little kingbird  
cannot fall without His notice,  
is it possible a great nation  
can rise without His blessing?

INT. FRANKLIN'S BEDROOM/HALLWAY - NIGHT (APRIL 17, 1790)

In bed, Dr. Franklin extends his hand to Benny. Temple enters.

BENNY

He is breathing more heavily. His  
pulse is almost negligible.

TEMPLE

(gently)  
He is dying, Benny.

BENNY

Stay with him. I will fetch Mama  
and Papa.

Benny grabs a lantern. Once in the hall, he sobs uncontrollably. Regaining his composure, he knocks on his parents' bedroom door.

BENNY

Mama. Papa. Come quickly!  
It is Grandpapa...

Raising the lantern, he guides them back. Joining Temple, Benny grips the Doctor's hand. Sarah caresses his face. Richard keeps watch.

FRANKLIN

Fran-kie?

The Doctor unleashes a deep, gentle sigh. Sarah shrieks before bursting into tears. Temple, unable to detect life in the great sage's body, closes his fixated eyes. Benny buries his head in his grandfather's chest and weeps. Richard comforts his wife.

EXT. WATERFRONT/HIGH STREET/CEMETERY - DAY

Church bells toll. A single drum beats. On the Delaware, American and French ships fly flags half-mast. At Christ Church, 20,000 mourners, led by Bishop White, the Baches, Jane Mecom, and Temple, march Dr. Franklin's body to a nearby burial ground. As the Bishop blesses the coffin, a Company of Militia fires a salute.

FRANKLIN'S POV

Shoveled dirt covers the casket.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT/HIGH STREET - SUMMER DAY

Movers load trunks onto wagons. Temple and the Baches gather around Benny. Temple hugs Sarah.

TEMPLE  
Farewell, Aunt Sally.

SARAH  
We will miss you dearly, Temple.  
God protect you always.

RICHARD  
Our regards to your father.

Temple, shaking Richard's hand, turns to Benny.

TEMPLE  
Forget Margot. Your friends in  
Europe await your return.

BENNY  
(handing him letters)  
Give them my duty.

TEMPLE  
Even from his grave, Grandpapa holds  
you prisoner—of Franklin Court.

BENNY  
As you are fond of saying, we can  
never escape him... Will you  
publish the papers he left you?

Turning away, Temple shrugs his shoulders. All wave good-bye as he disappears under the archway.

RICHARD  
Our wagon is ready.

SARAH  
It seems everyone is abandoning you,  
Benny. Do visit Settle Farm soon—

RICHARD  
And take good care of the tenant  
houses—I am relying on you. Do  
not forget to speak with Jesse.

Benny nods.

RICHARD  
Children, come at once and say  
good-bye to your brother.

Youngest to oldest, they bid Benny farewell. Willy is last.

BENNY  
Returning in the fall?

WILLY  
To finish my degree.

BENNY  
Then off to France.

WILLY  
Come with me.

BENNY  
I will be practicing law.

Sarah moves between them and kisses Benny's cheek.

SARAH  
And married to Margaret.

RICHARD  
If we are to arrive before sundown,  
we must leave now.

SARAH  
I have lived my entire life in  
Franklin Court. It breaks my heart—

Benny escorts his weeping mother, and family, under the archway.

ON HIGH STREET

After waving good-bye, Benny heads home. Meanwhile, a stylish woman, wearing a veiled hat, emerges from a crowd. Sensing a presence, he glances over his shoulder but finds no one there.

IN FRANKLIN COURT

Benny hears a voice singing "Caro Mio" and instinctively turns around. As Margaret stands before him, he grabs her, twirls her in the air, then sets her down before pressing his lips to hers.

BENNY  
Margot, I have missed you so.

MARGARET  
I left St. Croix as soon as—

BENNY  
My Grandpapa—

MARGARET  
Was the noblest of men.

BENNY

There was something remarkable about him even in death—his mind was sharp, his resolution unshaken, and his principles fixed.

(reaching for her hand)

If I could be half the man...

MARGARET

I cared for my grandfather in St. Croix. He wished his illness be kept secret—I so wanted to tell you. He died six weeks ago.

BENNY

(drawing her in)

My only thoughts, these past months, were of you and my Grandpapa... Did you receive my letters?

MARGARET

I could hardly have lived without them. Can you forgive me for not writing—and not having married you?

He leads her to the Mulberry tree and spreads out a blanket.

BENNY

That depends...on whether you marry me now.

MARGARET

That depends...on a proper proposal.

They cuddle on the ground.

BENNY

Marry me, Margot.

MARGARET

(mischievously)

But how will we survive?

Getting up, he kicks a stone while traversing the garden.

MARGARET

Benny, what is wrong?

BENNY

This town is teeming with lawyers and not one seems interested in the services of an apprentice.

MARGARET

(rises)

Did you not write that your Grandpapa has left you a print shop?

BENNY  
 Strange—now that he is gone, I am  
 not opposed to using it.

MARGARET  
 Then I shall assist you.

Cupping his hands over her eyes, he guides her to the shop.

INSIDE THE PRINT SHOP

Removing his hands, he shows her the fonts, press and bindery.

MARGARET  
 Dr. Franklin has left another  
 mark—'tis as if he were here.

He points to a portrait of Dr. Franklin. Margaret lets out a nervous laugh. Benny covers the painting, sets her on a table, reaches for a wine bottle, and pours two drinks.

BENNY  
 To posterity, liberty, and virtue.

MARGARET  
 To Dr. Franklin's legacy.

BENNY  
 (kissing her)  
 And to us.

INT./EXT. PRINT SHOP/HIGH STREET - DAY

Benny stops the presses while conferring with a tearful Jesse.

BENNY  
 I simply cannot afford your keep.

JESSE  
 But I have no where else to go.

BENNY  
 Grandpapa prepared you for your  
 freedom. He had you trained and  
 educated. You will find a good  
 family.

JESSE  
 I have given my life to the  
 services of a good family.

BENNY  
 I am afraid they have moved on—  
 and so must you.

Jessie scurries out. Benny hangs a broadside, removes his apron, and steps outside. Mr. Morris approaches from behind.

MORRIS

Your grandfather has left a terrible void.

BENNY

(shaking his hand)

Ah, Mr. Morris. To honor him I am publishing a gazette. I should like to call upon you and Sec. Jefferson for assistance.

MORRIS

What can I do for you?

BENNY

I am in need of a sponsor, and given your financial acumen as a banker—

MORRIS

I am not in the business of discouraging young men, but I have had the application of others who would not think of affiliating themselves with the likes of Jefferson.

BENNY

I am afraid, Sir, I do not understand.

MORRIS

Precisely. Too many gazettes already.  
(tips his hat)  
Good day.

Benny scratches his head. Dr. Logan advances, dragging Benny along.

LOGAN

How is old grouch Morris?

BENNY

Funny thing, Dr. Logan. The moment I mentioned Jefferson, he turned on me.

LOGAN

Simply a matter of politics. Jefferson opposes Hamilton. Hamilton and Morris are allies. Therefore—

BENNY

Therefore, Morris opposes Jefferson.

LOGAN

Of course, your grandfather and Jefferson were kindred spirits... You will be attending the next Philosophical meeting?

Benny nods. They part company.

EXT./INT. U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS - MINUTES LATER

As Benny approaches, Jefferson slams the door on the pompous ALEXANDER HAMILTON, 40.

JEFFERSON

Good day, Mr. Hamilton.

Gently opening the door, Benny observes an American flag, a globe, and Jefferson—frantically pacing the room. Jefferson seats Benny.

JEFFERSON

Hamilton, himself, picked this closet—his idea of revenge.

BENNY

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for the opportunity to present myself.

JEFFERSON

(sits)

It is only fitting that you should call upon me.

BENNY

My Grandpapa has left me a print shop. I plan to publish a gazette.

JEFFERSON

Very admirable. Have you considered publishing a national weekly to counter the Federalists and Hamilton?

BENNY

I am afraid it would not generate the necessary advertising.

JEFFERSON

It would, however, attract funding—through subscriptions. America needs a national Democratic gazette.

Madison barges in, prompting Jefferson to scribble on a sheet.

MADISON

Sorry for the intrusion—a question regarding the Bill of Rights.

JEFFERSON

(sliding Benny the note)

You are to contact merchant Israel Israel—a wealthy, like-minded friend. Rep. Madison—Benjamin Franklin Bache. He plans to publish a gazette.

They shake hands.

MADISON

We have met. You are Temple's cousin. What has become of him since losing his bid to be secretary of the Constitutional Convention?

BENNY

The narrow defeat crushed him. He has recently sailed for England.

MADISON

To join his traitorous father?

BENNY

(exiting)

Perhaps, you cast the decisive vote against him?

MADISON

I meant no offense.

JEFFERSON

He could prove quite beneficial.

INT. AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL HALL - EVENING

Dr. Bond pounds his gavel on a lectern amid an ever-expanding crowd. Benny, standing next to him, winks at Willy.

DR. BOND

Fellow members of the Philosophical Society, our meeting is adjourned—but please remain seated as we are joined by members of the Sons of St. Patrick, the German Democratic Society, and the Adopted Sons of Pennsylvania. I now present the grandson of our illustrious founder, newspaper publisher Benjamin Franklin Bache.

Polite applause ensues.

BENNY

Dr. Bond, Society members, and guests, As you are aware, I am editor of the new General Advertiser. A watchful sentinel over our nation's affairs, its sole mission is to enlighten the citizenry. Tonight, I must regrettably inform you that the Washington Administration, led by Federalist Minister Hamilton, has proposed disturbing aristocratic policies -evoking royal titles such as "Your Highness," expanding the Fugitive Slave Act, centralizing banks, and aligning itself with Britain's King George.

In the silence, Benny moves away from the lectern.

BENNY

Unfortunately, my Democratic friends, even a seemingly virtuous government can degenerate and bear bad fruit. We must be vigilant in our observances and not allow America to fall into the despotic hands of would be kings.

Many in the crowd shout, "Hear, hear."

Benny

In joining forces, we will give rise to a new party—the Democratic Party. Together, we will defeat the Federalists and keep the American Revolution alive. If necessary, we will forge a second revolution. One that heeds the will of the majority—our farmers—while protecting the rights of Indians and immigrants alike. One that opposes slavery, advances the cause of women, and organizes charities for the poor.

(applause erupts)

In our America, universal education and a free press will inform the citizenry. Liberty and virtue will flourish.

(the crowd wildly cheers)

EXT./INT. DELAWARE - SETTLE FARM - AUTUMN DAY

An amber sun swathes the tawny trees—yielding a soft golden glow. Benny and Margaret, traveling by buggy on back roads, admire the lush-looking landscape. As they near the house, Sarah, Elizabeth, and Jesse wave to them from a garden.

SARAH

Richard, come quickly! Elizabeth, gather your siblings. Jesse, tend to dinner—we have company.

Jesse pecks Benny's cheek before rushing off.

BENNY

Mama—I present Mrs. Benjamin Franklin Bache.

SARAH

(hugging Margaret)

Welcome to Settle Farm.

(turning to Richard)

They are married.

RICHARD

(embracing Margaret)

Oh, thank God.

SARAH  
Your father and I had planned on  
a proper wedding.

BENNY  
We were wedded three months ago in a  
simple ceremony at Christ Church.

SARAH  
Perhaps Margaret would have liked—  
The newlyweds grin at each other.

MARGARET  
Mrs. Bache—Mama, Papa—we do  
appreciate your concern—

RICHARD  
(heading to the house)  
This calls for a celebration.

SARAH  
Do select our best wine, dear...  
It so happens, we are cooking a  
turkey. There is more than enough.

Sarah intertwinies arms with Margaret.

SARAH  
You have made my son so very happy.

MARGARET  
I am carrying his baby.

SARAH  
Let's wait to tell Father Bache.

The ladies enter the house. Benny and the children noisily follow.

SARAH  
Richard, we are to be grandparents!

#### IN THE KITCHEN

As Jesse prepares the meal, the women set the table. The men sit by the fireplace while the children play in the corner. Willy pops in and hugs his mother.

SARAH  
Uncle Willy. You have heard the news?

Willy nods as he shakes his father's hand.

RICHARD  
Getting along with your professors?

Picking up a potato, Benny tosses it to his father.

BENNY  
Willy will deliver his thesis, "On  
the Natural History, Culture, and  
Qualities of the Potato."

RICHARD  
(holding it up)  
The potato?

WILLY  
(grabbing it)  
What is wrong with the potato?  
Grandpapa championed it.

SARAH  
Could you not have found a more  
appealing topic?

BENNY  
Not to worry. He is certain to  
attain a degree—his grandfather  
founded the school.

Willy pelts Benny's butt with it. Margaret scowls at her husband.

MARGARET  
Willy has earned his degree. Of  
that, you can be certain.

SARAH  
Enough silly conversation. We can  
sit, eat, and talk nonsense.

The adults gather at one table—the chatty children at another.  
Jesse, Sarah, and Elizabeth serve dinner.

RICHARD  
I suppose the Administration and  
Congress are well situated.

BENNY  
Tom Paine's "Rights of Man" caused  
quite a stir. My old schoolmate, John  
Quincy, has written a refutation—

WILLY  
Benny secretly published Paine's work  
at Sec. Jefferson's request. It seems  
Jefferson is at odds with Washington's  
entire Cabinet—especially Hamilton.

RICHARD  
As Secretary of State, Mr. Jefferson  
should be more diplomatic—above  
the fray so to speak.

Sarah and Elizabeth take their places.

SARAH  
If he were, who would keep "the  
Aristocrats" in order?

RICHARD  
Who are you calling "Aristocrats?"

SARAH  
President Washington—for one.

WILLY  
And that rather obvious monarchist—  
Mr. Hamilton.

BENNY  
Let's not forget "His Highness" John  
Adams—a title he bestowed on himself.

RICHARD  
The Vice President is harmless. But  
Washington? May he rue the day he re-  
fused me the Post Master Generalship.

MARGARET  
We have not said grace.

SARAH  
Margaret is right. Children hush  
and bow your heads. Richard—

All heads bow.

RICHARD  
Lord, we humbly thank Thee for Thy  
many blessings—

SARAH  
We especially thank Thee for the  
newest members of our family. Amen.

RICHARD  
(raising his wine glass)  
To Margaret, Benny, and the baby...

SARAH  
As a wedding gift, Richard and I  
have decided to deed you a tenant  
house... You should also be aware  
that against Papa's wishes, we have  
sold diamonds from the Miniature of  
King Louis. We plan to travel about  
Europe and are taking the children,  
with the exception of Elizabeth. She,  
like my Mama, is petrified of the  
high seas. Would you look after her?

Benny looks to Margaret, who nods.

BENNY

Of course. And we are most grateful for the house... But tell us, why have you defied Grandpapa's will?

SARAH

My whole life has been spent serving him, and I have but a few regrets—he never took me abroad and he never forgave William. Papa is dead but I am not. And as my brother cannot come to me—should I not go to him?

Silence envelopes the room as Jesse refills the drinks.

SARAH

The last letter we received from you, Benny, was written four months ago.

(looking fondly at Jesse)

You asked if we could employ Jesse—a most splendid idea... In that same letter, you mentioned foregoing the legal trade in favor of publishing a newspaper—

BENNY

The General Advertiser. We have sold advertisements and subscriptions.

Richard

Have you many takers?

BENNY

Willy and I have garnered quite a few from the Philosophical Society.

WILLY

And the Sons of St. Patrick and the Adopted Sons of Pennsylvania...

SARAH

Sounds like the makings of a political party to me.

BENNY

The Democratic Party.

SARAH

(waving her finger at Benny)

There will be plenty of squabbling in the new Capitol. Choose your allies carefully.

Benny glances at his wife.

RICHARD  
Spoken like a Franklin, dear.

BENNY  
I agree with Jefferson on most matters—but I would prefer to be more than his mouthpiece.

As Jesse clears the empty plates, Sarah assists her—glimpsing a bust of Franklin resting on the mantle.

SARAH  
Your Grandpapa shared Jefferson's philosophy of limited government. He would be most pleased.

INT. FRANKLIN COURT - PRINT SHOP - WINTER DAY

At his desk, an unshaven Benny talks to a portrait of his grandfather while pouring over papers.

BENNY  
Bill, bill, old news, bill. All I need is money and news.

As he buries his head in his arms, a pregnant Margaret opens the door, deposits a food tray, and tiptoes behind him—kissing his neck.

BENNY  
Margaret?!

Benny grabs his wife—hugging her stomach before kissing her lips. Hearing a knock, they hastily straighten-up. The lanky ISRAEL ISRAEL, 41, enters.

ISRAEL  
Excuse me for intruding.

BENNY  
Do come in. I was just tending to my wi-bills.

ISRAEL  
(shaking Benny's hand)  
I am Israel Israel. We have a mutual friend—Tom Jefferson.

BENNY  
Delighted to finally meet you. My wife, Margaret...

Israel tips his hat. Margaret carries the tray to Benny's desk.

MARGARET  
We were about to have lunch, Mr. Israel. There is plenty.

ISRAEL

Thank you kindly—but I only stopped  
by to discuss business.

MARGARET

(seating Israel)

Then I will leave you gentlemen alone.

ISRAEL

Mr. Bache, I admire your work—but  
investing in any paper at this  
time, even yours, is too risky.

BENNY

I intend to succeed, Mr. Israel.  
Philadelphia is my home. I was born  
not a hundred feet from this spot.

ISRAEL

I do not doubt your intentions. I was  
present for your passionate speech  
before the Philosophical Society.

At the door, Margaret finds a few gazettes and gives them to Israel.

MARGARET

No one else dares attack Washington  
in print and no one has been more  
supportive of the French Revolution.

ISRAEL

(rises)

Mrs. Bache, you are very persuasive.  
I will take three subscriptions.

Israel hands Margaret some coins before leaving. Benny kisses her  
clenched palm, then lips.

SERIES OF SHOTS - VARIOUS GAZETTES

Super: General Advertiser headlines over 1794 U.S. map (Vermont and  
Kentucky highlighted).

- Vermont Becomes 14th State, March, 1791;
- Bill Of Rights Ratified, December, 1791;
- Kentucky Becomes 15th State, June, 1792;
- King Louis XVI Beheaded, January, 1793;
- France At War With England, February, 1793;
- Genet Arrives In America, April, 1793;
- Washington Proclaims Neutrality, August, 1793;
- British Seize American Ships, March, 1794;
- Jefferson Resigns Cabinet, June, 1794;

EXT. WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA - DAY

(OCTOBER 26, 1794)

On horseback, and in full uniform, Washington and Hamilton lead  
thousands of U.S. Cavalry through an open field.

INT. FRANKLIN COURT PRINT SHOP - AFTERNOON - TWO DAYS LATER

Sporting a five o'clock shadow, Benny sits with ALEXANDER DALLAS, 33. A bearded Irish assistant, WILLIAM DUANE, 35, works the press.

DUANE

Mr. Dallas, why do you suppose Pres. Washington and Sec. Hamilton led an army against Pennsylvania farmers?

The towering Dallas stands.

DALLAS

Federalists wish to send the message, Mr. Duane, that they are to be obeyed—that the whiskey tax must be paid. Frankly, uprisings like the Whiskey Rebellion scare the hell out of them. Afraid of the French Revolution invading our shores, they curb French migration. Fearful of rising social classes, they repress runaway slaves, Jews, Germans, and Irish Catholics.

Benny shows Dallas an Aurora with its "rising sun logo" (a half-sun) and the headline, "Washington Squashes Whiskey Rebellion."

BENNY

Our new gazette—soon to be the most widely read in America.

DALLAS

Aurora—meaning, "the dawn." Impressive.

BENNY

Our paper and your organization have boldly rallied the immigrants. We have founded a great party.

A very pregnant and dowdy Margaret appears with BEN, JR., 2. The boy runs to his father.

BEN, JR.

Papa, Papa!

BENNY

(picking him up)

How is my young Democrat?

MARGARET

I am glad you are still here... Should I borrow my sister's dress for the Ball, Caro Bene?

BENNY

(putting him down)

Attend a Ball in your condition?

MARGARET  
 (stroking her stomach)  
 The baby is due any day—I can feel  
 it. The Ball is three weeks away.

BENNY  
 Who will look after the children?

MARGARET  
 My sister.

DALLAS  
 You must attend, Benny.

Handing Dallas a "Liberty Cap," Benny reaches for the door.

DALLAS  
 Good Day, Mrs. Bache, Mr. Duane.

MARGARET  
 Benny—be home for supper.

Margaret clings to the door. Duane hands her the mail.

DUANE  
 Benny has forgotten the post.

MARGARET  
 He has forgotten a whole lot more...  
 Watch Ben, Jr. for a moment.

Ben, Jr., and Duane exchange smiles.

IN THE COURTYARD

MARGARET  
 Benny? Benny!

Suddenly, a carriage pulls in. Sarah climbs out and assists Jane.  
 Margaret embraces them.

MARGARET  
 Mother Bache, Aunt Jane.

SARAH  
 Aunt Jane insisted we visit.

JANE  
 'Tis my idea. I just had to see  
 my favorite young couple.

MARGARET  
 A most pleasant surprise... Benny  
 has gone out for awhile. Let's  
 wait for him by the Mulberry  
 tree—I will fetch Ben, Jr.

EXT./INT. BLACK BEAR THEATRE - SAME TIME

Dallas and Benny, waiting in line, spot a French furniture wagon.

BENNY  
Magnificent. People are actually  
buying French furniture—

DALLAS  
And drinking French coffee.

Escorted by cavalry, Washington sits enthroned upon a carriage  
while his coachman steers six horses.

BENNY  
I heard even King George Washington  
has employed a French cook.

They chuckle as Dallas pays their admission.

IN THE THEATRE

The house is full. Dallas and Benny stand in the back.

On stage, King Louis XVI appears in full view of a guillotine.  
Queen Marie cowers at his feet. As the King looks down on her, she  
faints. A priest, bearing a small crucifix and a prayer book,  
kneels before him.

On first cue, a hooded executioner places the King's head on the  
block. On second cue, the blade drops. The King's head lands in a  
basket. The audience sits in horrified awe—then reacts favorably.

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT - CONTINUOUS

Sarah, Jane, and Margaret sit under the Mulberry tree, sipping  
lemonade. Ben, Jr., rests in his mother's lap.

SARAH  
We are very concerned. People are  
saying Benny's demeanor has changed—  
that he is following a ruinous path.  
He has written his father for money.

JANE  
Of course, Benny is industrious. But  
the newspaper business is a dreadful  
one. And unpaid subscriptions can  
only create for you an estate in the  
clouds...  
(grasping Margaret's worn skirt)  
...And you, my child, were raised to  
expect more from life here on earth.

MARGARET  
While much of what you say is true,  
I am still quite happy...

EXT. CHESTNUT STREET - SAME TIME

Benny and Dallas tip their hats to a FRENCH LADY.

FRENCH LADY  
Monsieur Bache. Monsieur Dallas.

DALLAS  
Speaking as your friend, Benny, I suggest you take Margot to the Ball.

BENNY  
You know I think it frivolous—

DALLAS  
When was the last time you danced with your wife?

A GERMAN MAN and a scare-faced Scot, SCOTTY MACGREGOR, 37, approach.

GERMAN MAN  
Guten tag, Heir Bache.

BENNY  
Guten tag.

MACGREGOR  
Headed to City Tavern?

Benny nods. He, Dallas, and MacGregor dodge traffic.

BENNY  
Any news, Scotty MacGregor?

MACGREGOR  
Yellow fever is back.

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT - MULBERRY TREE - CONTINUOUS

Margaret, hovering over her relatives, soothes them with lemonade.

MARGARET  
I do not deny our struggle—and I am concerned for the children. But I love Benny and his principles.

SARAH  
Then I shall have his father lend the money... But bear in mind dear—a news editor and his family are never really secure.

MARGARET  
(sitting with Ben, Jr.)  
As Dr. Franklin would say, "Those who desire a little security over liberty deserve neither."

JANE

I hope Benny has not inherited my brother's dreadful habit of neglecting his family.

SARAH

Papa never neglected us—he just fancied himself to be Jonathon Swift's "Gulliver."

EXT. CITY TAVERN - SAME TIME

On a flag-draped porch, Israel and fellow Democrats surround the ostentatious French Ambassador, CITIZEN GENET, 31 (carrying a scroll). Benny and Dallas embrace him. MacGregor fetches the ale.

BENNY

Bon jour, Ambassador Genet.

GENET

My fellow Democrat—Mr. Bache.

Genet shoves the scroll in Benny's vest and walks away.

ISRAEL

I hope you and your lovely wives will be attending the Ball.

BENNY

(looking at Dallas)  
We would not miss it.

ISRAEL

Look at Genet. He walks around as if he were King... What have you there?

While MacGregor serves pints, Benny pulls a gazette from his vest.

MACGREGOR

To the new Aurora.

DALLAS

To a new dawn.

ISRAEL

To a new investor.

As the crowd sings the Marseillaise, Benny slips away.

EXT. CHESTNUT STREET - CONTINUOUS

At knifepoint, Benny is assaulted and dragged into an alley. WILLIAM COBBETT, 50, a dour, burly Englishman with a thick brogue, uses a British flag to string up his bloodied victim.

COBBETT

Look at those girly eyes.

BENNY

Cobbett, you scoundrel, put me down.  
I have done nothing to harm you.

Slowly dropping him, Cobbett keeps the flag noose in place.

COBBETT

You incited a mob of Democrats to  
burn my print shop. I should cut  
your treasonous throat.

Seizing the noose, Benny escapes Cobbett's clutches. The Genet scroll falls from his vest.

BENNY

Because I dare criticize Washington?

COBBETT

Because you are Old Lightning Rod's  
protégé. As long as you live—he  
lives. Without you, he is nothing.

Benny throws the blood-stained flag at Cobbett's feet and flees.  
Cobbett picks up the scroll.

BENNY

You are mad—like George III!

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT - MINUTES LATER

Benny staggers in. Margaret, rushing to him, stumbles as  
contractions immobilize her. Jane and Sarah tend to them.

INT. ISRAEL'S MANSION - BALLROOM - NIGHT - THREE WEEKS LATER

Musicians provide cues as Israel introduces VIPs.

ISRAEL

Ladies and gentlemen, attention please.  
I present Secretary of State, Thomas  
Jefferson, and his guest, Mary Jones.

Jefferson bows. His stunning companion curtsies. Guests applaud.  
The couple greets dignitaries in the receiving line.

ISRAEL

Newly married Congressman, James  
Madison, and his wife, Dolly.

Guests wildly applaud the charming and elegant Dolly Todd Madison,  
26. The Madisons follow Jefferson.

ISRAEL

Governor Mifflin's Chief of Staff,  
William Dallas, and his wife, Bella.

Guests politely applaud. Mr. and Mrs. Dallas follow the Madisons.

ISRAEL  
 Newspaper publisher, Benjamin Franklin  
 Bache and his wife, Margaret.

As the Baches appear, guests react unabashedly. The orchestra plays "Caro Mio" and the dancing commences.

SERIES OF SHOTS - VARIOUS GAZETTES

Super: Aurora headlines over 1796 U.S. Map (Tennessee highlighted).

- Yellow Fever Kills 1000, Washington Flees Capitol, August, 1794;
- Jay Hung In Effigy, March, 1795;
- Washington Signs Jay Treaty, August, 1795;
- Treaty With Spain Approved, March, 1796;
- Tennessee Becomes 16th State, June, 1796;
- France Voids Treaty With U.S., July, 1796;
- Washington Recalls French Ambassador James Monroe, August, 1796;
- Washington Delivers Farewell Address, September, 1796.

EXT. HIGH STREET - DUSK (NOVEMBER 1, 1796)

Four horsemen gallop to the gated archway at Franklin Court.

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT PRINT SHOP - DUSK - CONTINUOUS

A slightly bearded Benny prepares bundles of broadsides and voting cards. Dallas and Duane assist him. JOHN BECKLEY, 35, a stocky, cigar-smoking Democrat operative, whistles for his riders.

DALLAS  
 We must stop Adams, Mr. Beckley.

BECKLEY  
 (treading on his cigar)  
 "His Supreme Highness" will be crushed.

The four horseman surface. Dallas and Duane pack their saddles.

DALLAS  
 We are loading them up with hundreds  
 of broadsides and voting cards.

BECKLEY  
 What is in the broadside?

DUANE  
 The case for President Jefferson  
 and the Democrats.

BENNY  
 It refers to Jefferson's belief in  
 limited government and his authorship  
 of the Declaration. It warns that an  
 Adams victory would bring further  
 Federalist tyranny, a pact with  
 England, and war with France.

BECKLEY

(lighting a new cigar)

Riders, listen-up. Pennsylvania and Maryland are the key to victory.

(punctuates remarks with cigar)

Hit our allies—farmers and ranchers—first. The day before the election, hit the townsfolk. The Federalists and Hamilton will not have time to respond... Riders, are you ready?

HORSEMEN

Yes, sir!

BECKLEY

Godspeed!

SERIES OF SHOTS - BALLOT DELIVERY

The horsemen deliver ballots in rural, then urban areas.

INT./EXT. FRANKLIN COURT HOUSE - PARLOR - SPRING DAY

On the sofa, Margaret knits while Benny reads a gazette. Ben, Jr., 5, FRANKLIN, 3, and YOUNG RICHARD, 1, play with wooden blocks.

BENNY

Damn those Federalists.

MARGARET

I will not have you swearing in front of the children.

BENNY

Adams stole the election.

MARGARET

The race was so very close.

BENNY

This surely means war with France.

MARGARET

Maybe not. Mr. Jefferson will be Vice President.

BENNY

Only if Washington steps down.

Suddenly, a rock crashes through the window—nearly hitting young Richard. Benny leaps in the crying boy's direction. Ben, Jr., and Franklin run to their mother. Benny hands her the toddler, then picks up the rock—finding an attached note.

BENNY

(opening the door)

Cowards!

MARGARET  
Close the door. Do you want  
something horrible happening to  
your wife and sons?

Shutting it, Benny huddles with his family.

BENNY  
How are my brave Democrats?

MARGARET  
A little scared, I should think.

BENNY  
The scapegraces would be pleased.

MARGARET  
What if you had not been home?

BENNY  
When am I not by your side?

MARGARET  
And the children?

BENNY  
They will survive.

MARGARET  
What does the note say?

BENNY  
(hesitating)  
It reads, "to Bache, Jacobin and  
traitor, your days are few."

MARGARET  
Must you continue publishing?

Benny drops the rock and returns a look of disbelief.

MARGARET  
You are as stubborn as your Grand...

Grabbing his cudgel, he walks to the door.

MARGARET  
Where are you going?

BENNY  
To the print shop—I need to think.  
I would like you and the boys to  
pack for Settle Farm.

MARGARET  
We are not leaving without you.

EXT./INT. FRANKLIN COURT - PRINT SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Benny storms in, slams the door, and crinkles the note—throwing it at a painting of Dr. Franklin.

BENNY

I will kill Cobbett.  
 (talking to the portrait)  
 Tell me. What should I do next?  
 Surrender? Send my wife and sons  
 away? Sending loved ones away was  
 easy for you... I was just a boy  
 when you plucked me from my family,  
 then sent me away. But you had  
 designs on me. I was to be your  
 protégé. Your sons could not and  
 Temple refused—he knew the burden  
 would be unbearable. So, like a  
 master sculptor, you molded me in  
 your image.

He tearfully searches around. Finding an American flag and "Kingbird," he grabs both.

BENNY

Until now, I never felt trapped in  
 your shadow. I embraced your legacy  
 and championed your ideas because  
 they were, like you, virtuous.  
 Serving your country and enlightening  
 humanity seemed effortless—you hid  
 your sacrifice and suffering in your  
 good and curious nature. I only  
 ever wished to be a lawyer, to be  
 happy, and to be as good as you—not  
 to become you. Free me of your  
 burden! Free me... Free me.

With the flag, Benny drapes his grandfather's likeness.

BENNY

Forgive me—I forgive you.

Sobbing uncontrollably, he sinks to the floor.

EXT. DELAWARE RIVERFRONT - DAY

A clean-shaven Benny presents Ben, Jr., with "Kingbird."

BENNY

Your great-grandfather gave me this  
 kite when I was your age. He would  
 have wanted you to have it.

BEN, JR.

Did he teach you to fly?

Smiling, Benny directs his son through the flying process.

BENNY

When you wish to fly on your own,  
put the kite on the ground, let out  
the string, and walk a few paces—  
against the wind. As your pace  
quickens, the kite will rise.

BEN, JR.

Why not walk with the wind?

The kite becomes airborne.

BENNY

The course of least resistance, Ben,  
Jr., is often the least enlightened.

BEN, JR.

Look Papa, I am flying.

BENNY

(to himself)

Like a kingbird.

INT. CONGRESS HALL - INAUGURATION DAY

(APRIL, 1797)

A portrait of the U.S. Chief Justice administering the Presidential Oath to John Adams comes to life. Benny enters a packed hall of dignitaries and well-wishers. He squeezes next to Duane in the standing area.

ADAMS

I pledge to support the Constitution  
of the United States to the utmost  
of my power. And may that Being, who  
is supreme over all, continue His  
blessing upon this nation and give  
it all possible success consistent  
with the ends of His providence.

Spontaneous applause erupts. The audience rises. President Adams marches down the aisle.

DUANE

(to Benny)

There will be no King George—  
Washington has relinquished.

Washington motions Jefferson to follow Adams. Jefferson hesitates. Washington waits upon him. Houdon's "Bust of Franklin" observes from a shelf atop the front entrance.

EXT. FRANKLIN COURT - GARDEN PARTY - DAY

(JULY 4, 1798)

As a band plays patriotic tunes, guests wave sparklers and flags. A mob invades. The music stops. Benny confronts Cobbett.

BENNY

British loyalists do not celebrate Independence Day, but the rest of us do—so take your cronies and get out.

COBBETT

Ladies and Gentlemen, an agent of Talleyrand and the French, Mr. Bache.

BENNY

(aiming his cane at him)  
Prove it, Cobbett.

COBBETT

(waving a scroll)  
We have the document.

BENNY

It is a counterfeit.

COBBETT

Traitor—your arrest is imminent.

BENNY

Federalists have expelled innocent immigrants under the Alien and Sedition Acts—but they will never succeed in prosecuting me.

Guests applaud. Duane emerges from the shop.

COBBETT

Benny Bache, friend of the French and the Irish—we treat you as we would a dog, a Turk, a Jacobin, or a Jew.

DUANE

Cobbett attacks this man because he prints the truth—France does not seek war—England does. The Brits already have the blood of 100,000 Americans—

Cobbett lunges at Duane's throat. Benny intervenes with his cudgel.

BENNY

It is my throat you want—but it is my stick you will get—if you do not move off my property.

COBBETT

You mean your Papa's property... You cannot afford the shirt on your back.

Amid the snickering, Benny uses his cudgel for dramatic effect.

BENNY

The X, Y, Z Affair has maddened the likes of you. President Adams clamors for war because French Minister Talleyrand sought a bribe from our government?

Some shout, "Hear, hear."

COBBETT

The French also seize our ships. Even Washington has forsaken retirement to lead an army against them.

BENNY

Strange. The Brits control our ports—yet you do not seek war with England.  
(pleading with the crowd)  
We must remain neutral. Our nation is not yet ready for war.

COBBETT

Which nation is that, Bache, America or France?

BENNY

Neither the frowns of men nor the allurements of riches could alter my allegiance to America.

A gun shot blast disperses the uproarious crowd. As a sheriff detains Benny, an expectant Margaret hastens to his side.

INT. OLD CITY HALL COURTROOM - TWO WEEKS LATER

Citizens pack the gallery. Dallas and Israel sit at the defense table. While Benny stands in the prisoner's dock, Cobbett postures before a distinguished-looking JUDGE, 60.

JUDGE

Mr. Cobbett, you claim to possess a document proving Mr. Bache has spied for Talleyrand, Minister of France?

Cobbett nervously hands him a scroll.

JUDGE

How did you obtain this document?

COBBETT

An anonymous source, your Honor. Bache evidently dropped it in the street.

A few in the stunned crowd yell, "Liar." The Judge pounds his gavel.

JUDGE

Is this true, Mr. Bache?

BENNY

In part, yes... Several years ago, at City Tavern, Ambassador Genet shoved a scroll in my vest. Moments later, I left the tavern and was assaulted by Cobbett. The scroll went missing.

COBBETT

He is lying! Your Honor—

JUDGE

Mr. Bache, have you any witnesses?

BENNY

Only to my former injuries.

JUDGE

(examining the document)  
Interesting, the French seal is missing... Furthermore, I have an official copy of Talleyrand's signature. It does not compare with the one in this letter.

COBBETT

There must be some mistake.

JUDGE

It appears to be in your judgment.

Several in the gallery snicker.

JUDGE

Mr. Bache, I am dismissing this charge.  
(applause, then gavel, erupt)  
But you are hereby under arrest for your published attacks against the President of the United States. Bail is set at four thousand dollars.

A sense of shock cloaks the courtroom.

DALLAS

What law has Mr. Bache broken?

JUDGE

He has allegedly broken The Sedition Act, Mr. Dallas. As editor of the Aurora, Mr. Bache has voiced vile criticisms of President Adams.

BENNY

The first right of a freeman is  
to speak and publish his sentiments.

Many shout, "Hear, hear."

JUDGE

A trial will convene October 1,  
1798 in the year of our Lord.  
This courtroom is adjourned.

Duane, Dallas, and Israel surround Benny. A court officer handcuffs him. As Margaret and her sons approach, Duane blocks their view.

ISRAEL

I will immediately post bail.

EXT./INT. PHILADELPHIA - SUMMER DAY

A scorching sun pierces a lifeless city. Row house after row house appears still. In the quiet corner of a small room, Benny assists Dr. Rush as he bleeds Scotty MacGregor.

BENNY

Why must yellow fever and death so  
readily visit the poor, Dr. Rush?

RUSH

At least, in America, the poor must  
not remain so. Your grandfather  
proved the point... But in the end,  
Benny, death is the great equalizer.  
(closing MacGregor's eyes)  
Sooner or later, it comes for us all.

INT. FRANKLIN COURT HOUSE - BLUE ROOM - DAY

On the sofa, Benny studies a document. Margaret (pregnant) reads a letter. The Bache boys play with logs.

MARGARET

Your mother has written to wish  
you a happy 29<sup>th</sup> birthday. She begs  
us to celebrate it at Settle Farm  
where "the river is cool, the trees  
are green, and the air is pure..."  
Are you listening dear?

Benny, still pouring over the document, nods.

MARGARET AND SARAH (VO)

"...There are no mosquitoes, no  
yellow fever, and no Cobbett..."

SARAH (VO)

"We will swim in the river, talk,  
sing, and enjoy the evening breeze."

Margaret moves to the arm of Benny's chair and nibbles on his ear.

BENNY

Sounds inviting—take the children.

MARGARET

All of us should go, Caro Bene.  
I am in no condition—

BENNY

If the poor cannot flee—how can I?  
Besides, who would be left to fight  
Cobbett and the Federalists?

MARGARET

Must we always be fighting Cobbett  
and the Federalists? Isn't it  
enough that you are to stand trial?  
(feeling his forehead)  
Oh, Benny, you are warm! You have  
not caught the fever?

Rising, he holds up the document.

BENNY

Today we received word that the  
French are relenting. They want  
peace. The Aurora must proclaim it.  
We must let Adams and the  
Federalists know that freedom of  
the press shall not be infringed.

MARGARET

For the sake of the children.

Margaret falters from a contraction. Benny positions her  
comfortably, then grabs his cudgel.

BENNY

I will fetch Dr. Rush. Ben, Jr.,  
watch over your Mama.

BEN, JR.

Yes, Papa.

EXT. PHILADELPHIA - CONTINUOUS

Partially covered corpses, infested with flies and maggots,  
line the cobblestone streets and Benny's path.

INT./EXT. FRANKLIN COURT - PRINT SHOP/HOUSE - NIGHT

Margaret assists Duane. Benny rests in a makeshift bed beside her.  
Nearby, the BABY sleeps in a cradle. The Bache boys tussle about.

MARGARET

Quiet down. Your father is very sick.

DUANE  
Have you named the baby?

Margaret  
(wiping Benny's brow)  
Hartman Temple—after my father  
and Benny's cousin.

BENNY  
It is no use. I am on fire.

Drying his drenched body, Margaret wraps him in a light blanket. She and Duane ready a stretcher.

BENNY  
We must stop the war—

MARGARET  
Save your strength, Benny.

BENNY  
Is the Aurora ready?

After retrieving a hanging gazette, Duane notices tears falling down Margaret's despondent face.

MARGARET  
Help me move him to the parlor.

In a funeral-like procession, Duane, Margaret, and the boys march Benny from the print shop to the house. Ben, Jr., carries the baby.

IN THE BLUE ROOM

They lay Benny on a sofa. Margaret kneels at his side.

BENNY  
Raise our sons to be virtuous and free.

MARGARET  
I love you, my Caro Bene—my Kingbird.  
Ben, Jr., Franklin, Richard...

As the boys lineup beside their father, Duane takes the baby from Ben, Jr. Margaret places her arms under her husband's head and softly sings "Caro Mio." Benny stares at his grandfather's portrait.

FLASHBACK - SCENES OF BENNY'S LIFE

BACK TO PRESENT

Benny's lifeless eyes shift upon his wife and tearful sons.

BENNY  
You must carry on.

Margaret buries her head in her husband's chest and weeps.

INT./EXT. FRANKLIN COURT - PRINT SHOP - DAWN

A newsboy gathers papers in the window-front office of the Aurora. Upon leaving, he reads the headline, "Bache Dies, France Ends Naval Blockade" and walks westward on High Street, delivering the news.

MARGARET (VO)

The Friends of Civil Liberty and patrons of the Aurora are informed that Benjamin Franklin Bache has fallen victim to the plague which ravishes this city. In ordinary times, the loss of such a man would be a source of public sorrow.

A lone kingbird glides above the State House in the opposite direction of the boy, whose path it nearly crosses.

MARGARET (VO)

In these times, men who see and think and feel for their country and posterity can alone appreciate the loss; the loss of a man inflexible in virtue, appalled by power or persecution, and who, in dying, knew no anxieties but what were excited by his apprehensions for his country and young family.

The bird soars past Franklin Court and around the Christ Church steeple until seemingly reaching the sun rising over the Delaware.

MARGARET (VO)

This calamity suspends the Aurora, but for a few days only. When such arrangements shall have been made as are necessary to ensure its wanted character of intelligence and energy, it will appear under the direction of his widow—Philadelphia, September 11, 1798—one o'clock in the morning.

Fade out.

SUPERIMPOSE

A few months following Benny Bache's death, the Adams Administration ceased its undeclared war on France (a war, most historians agree, the fledgling United States of 1798 could not have won).

A year later, Margaret Bache married William Duane. Together, they raised the Bache boys and continued publishing the Aurora.

Upon his election as President in 1800, Jefferson credited Bache, and the Democratic Party they founded, with his victory—calling it "the Second American Revolution." The Alien and Sedition Acts were abolished and Freedom of the Press restored.

In 1823, after carelessly editing his grandfather's papers—leaving them scattered about a Parisian farmhouse—Temple Franklin died a broken, lonely, and forgotten man.

Today, the Democratic Party still stands—making it the oldest political party in the Western Hemisphere.

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790).

Benjamin Franklin Bache (1769-1798).

Kingbird *n* (1769) 1 : a small American bird noted for its courage in attacking larger birds, even hawks and eagles.

THE END